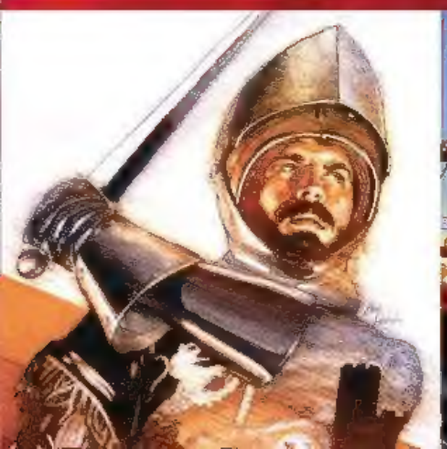
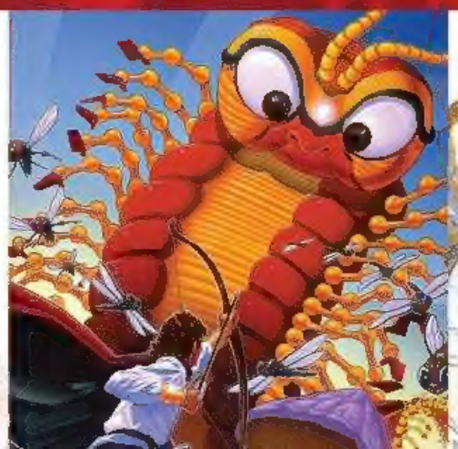
# ART OF ATARI®

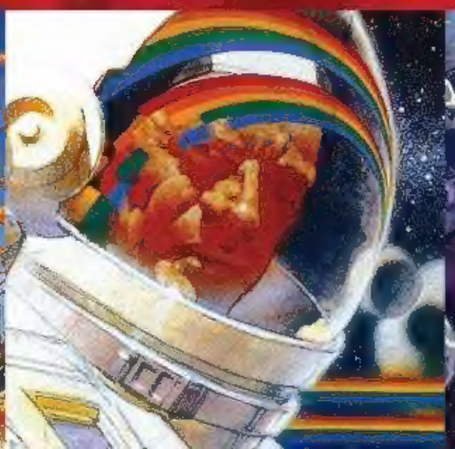
TIM LAPETINO

Foreword by **ERNEST CLINE**, Author of **READY PLAYER ONE** and **ARMADA**

Afterword by **ROBERT V. CONTE**







# HAVE YOU PLAYED ATARI TODAY?




**"For me, revisiting the beautiful artwork presented in this book is almost as good as taking a trip in Doc Brown's time machine back to that halcyon era at the dawn of the digital age. But be warned, viewing these images may leave you with an overwhelming desire to revisit the ancient pixelated battlefields they each depict as well."**

—from the Foreword by **ERNEST CLINE**, Author of **READY PLAYER ONE**

**SINCE 1972**, Atari has pioneered video game technology which revolutionized entertainment and birthed the modern gaming industry. The company created arcade games, home consoles, and personal computers to entertain millions, creating instant classics like *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Missile Command* and *Yars' Revenge*.

To bridge the gap between imagination and the new era of video games, Atari employed an array of talented artists and designers to emblazon game cartridges, packaging, and advertising with their mind-blowing visions. These sci-fi, sports and adventure worlds elevated classic video games to the realm of high art.

**ART OF ATARI** is the first official collection of original art created for its groundbreaking video games. Sourced from museums and private collections worldwide, this volume spans more than four decades of incredible art and design. Whether you're a fan, a collector, or new to the world of Atari, this book offers the most complete retrospective of Atari artwork ever produced!

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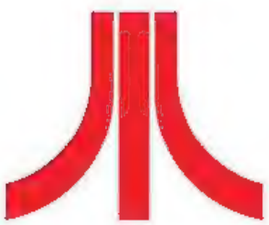

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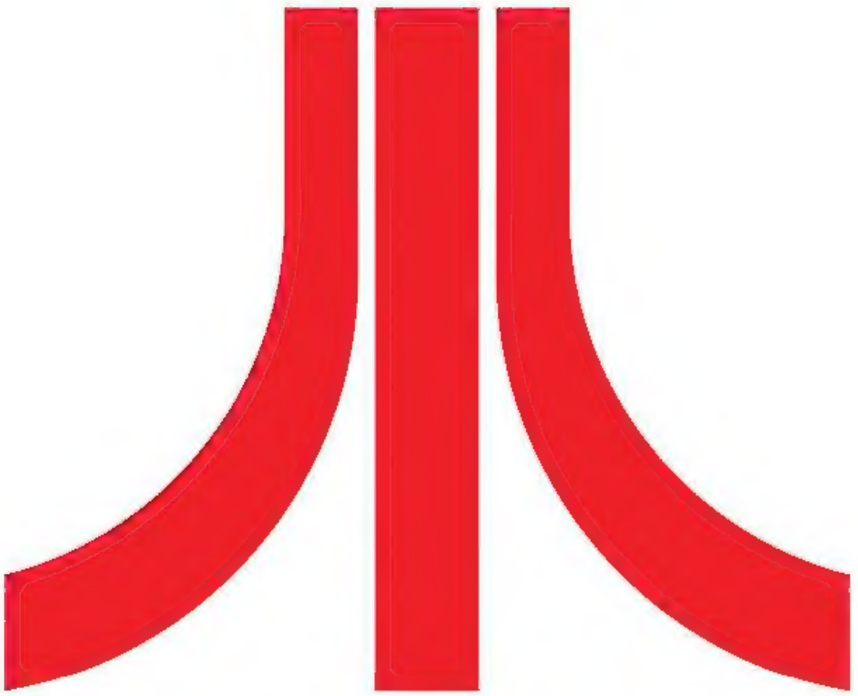

# ART OF ATARI®

## TIM LAPETINO

Foreword by **ERNEST CLINE**

Afterword by **ROBERT V. CONTE**

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◂ Detail of cover art for *Pac-Man* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

# FOREWORD

## ERNEST CLINE

**"THE BOX ARTWORK WAS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE RITUAL OF ESCAPE YOU EXPERIENCED EACH TIME YOU PLAYED AN ATARI GAME.**

**IN A PLAYER'S MIND, THE ARTWORK ON THE LABEL WOULD BE FOREVER LINKED TO THE DIGITAL ARTIFACT INSIDE."**

**THE ATARI 2600** was the first video game console my family ever owned, and receiving that "Heavy Sixer" console for Christmas in 1978 would end up drastically altering the course of my life and career. Prior to this, the time I'd spent playing video games would have probably only amounted to just a few hours, doled out in all-too-brief twenty-five cent increments at my local arcade, or in the lobby of my small hometown movie theater. I invariably ran out of quarters before I'd had my fill, and each time I'd be forced to exit the game room flat broke and longing for more. But once we got our Atari, my younger brother and I could play any of our half-dozen or so video game cartridges for hours on end. In the summer, when we were out of school, we would escape into the Atari's alternate reality all day long, until our parents finally began to fear for our vision and our sanity and forced us to go outside and try to amuse ourselves under the harsh rays of the sun.

My memories of all the blissful hours I spent playing Atari games will always be tied to the artwork on their packaging. My first impression of each game came from the artwork on the front of its box, usually a dynamic illustration that depicted the experience you were promised to have while playing it. And since that same artwork also appeared on the label of the cartridge itself, you would catch another glimpse of it each time you slid the game into your cassette to play. It was like studying the cover artwork on your favorite rock album, cassette tape, or CD before you played it on your stereo—or admiring the movie poster art printed on the front of a videotape's sleeve each time you slid a favorite VHS tape into your VCR. The feelings evoked by the imagery plastered on the media's packaging was a preamble to the experience of listening, watching, or playing what was contained inside.

The box artwork was an essential part of the ritual of escape you experienced each time you played an Atari game. In a player's mind, the artwork on the label would be forever linked to the digital artifact inside. One informed the other. Even though the crude graphics of the games themselves were never quite as colorful or realistic as the illustrations depicted, that artwork had an almost magical way of elevating your gameplay experience, by helping your imagination bridge the gap between the crude pixelated shapes dancing across your TV screen and the fantastic images they could conjure in your mind's eye.

Atari games played a vital role in the inspiration for my bestselling novel, *Ready Player One*, a story about an eccentric billionaire video game designer who holds an Easter egg hunt inside his most popular game, in order to find a worthy successor to his fortune. This plot was partially inspired by Atari's ill-fated *SwordQuest* contest, which utilized clues hidden inside the comic book artwork included with each game cartridge—allowing readers to solve a series of fiendish puzzles in order to win fabulous prizes. I was also inspired by the very first video game Easter egg ever discovered, the secret room in Atari's *Adventure*, where the game's creator, Warren Robinett, hid his name. He did this because, at the time, Atari didn't give credit to its game designers, so their names didn't appear anywhere on their game's packaging, leaving their identities a mystery. The artist who created Atari's box and label artwork suffered the same indignity, and that's one of the reasons I'm so pleased about the release of this book. Here, in these pages, you'll finally learn the names of the artists who created the images that were such an indelible part of so many of our childhoods.

For me, revisiting the beautiful artwork presented in this book is almost as good as taking a trip in Doc Brown's time machine back to that halcyon era at the dawn of the digital age. But be warned, viewing these images may leave you with an overwhelming desire to revisit the ancient pixelated battlefields they each depict as well. Which begs the question ... Have you played Atari today? ■

*Ernest Cline is a New York Times bestselling author and screenwriter, known for his passion for Atari and his amazing, video-game inspired novels, Ready Player One and Armada.*

**↑ Catalog montage art**
**Artist: John Mattos**

# INTRODUCTION

## TIM LAPETINO

**I WAS FIVE YEARS** old when my dad brought home an Atari VCS from our neighborhood video store in Chicago. The Atari 2600 had already become a gigantic, category-defining success, spawning a new industry of home video games. In the six years since its release, Atari had blanketed the U.S. with its marketing power in print ads, TV commercials, and the pages of my favorite comic books. I wanted one. From the moment we first plugged it in, I was hooked. The rainbow of colored boxes, the soft click of that single orange joystick button, the deluge of bleeps and bonks coming from our little bedroom TV. It was almost too much.

Like many other '80s kids, I loved *Missile Command*, *Pac-Man*, *Berzerk*, *Joust*, *Enduro*, and countless others. My brothers and I logged endless hours in front of our 2600, racking up high scores in *Space Invaders*, *Kaboom!*, and a slew of other first-generation Atari games.

But it wasn't just the games that enthralled me. For me, and I suspect, many other kids, a significant part of the experience went beyond our on-screen adventures. The games were just a prelude to creating our own elaborate, imaginary worlds, and one of the windows into the video game world was Atari box artwork. I would stare for hours at the beautiful illustrations on games like *Missile Command*, *Warlords*, *Star Raiders* and *Super Breakout*, letting that art transport me to deep space, burning battlefields, and other exotic locales spawned from our Zenith TV. The game, the artwork, and my imagination all rolled into one, adding additional dimensions to the game cartridges popped into my console.

Those visuals seared my brain like a lightning bolt, and even through a creative career in design and branding, they never left my consciousness. Twenty years after playing a 2600 for the first time, I still wondered—who were the men and women behind the art and design of Atari? I've always been interested in creative process as a way to understand people, to unpack how others create, whether it be logo design or a director's film commentary.

So, I undertook a quest to unearth the identities of those unsung heroes of Atari—illustrators, designers, art directors, industrial designers and others—to tell their stories and share insights into the work they did. I slowly acquired artwork in the form of slides, transparencies, and original pieces. My research gained momentum and girth, like a snowball rolling downhill. Countless hours digging in the dark corners of the Internet yielded some opportune leads—to hundreds of interviews, emails, and phone calls, connecting with people, events, and work that happened four decades ago. I logged thousands of miles by car, plane, and train to interview, research, and acquire art that ended up in this book. I'm glad to say that this volume will help shine a light on the work of people like George Opperman, Cliff Spohn, Susan Jaekel, Regan Cheng, Fred Thompson, Hiro Kimura, and many, many more.

These talented creatives weren't just selling video games, though. They were leading us by the hand into uncharted territory. By today's standards, the games were simple, crude, and visually underwhelming. But that's not how they felt at their introduction—the phosphor bright worlds that Atari created were groundbreaking. It might be hard for today's kids—who've cut their teeth on multi-threaded processors and advanced graphical engines—to comprehend this nascent world and its impact. It was even hard for us to understand at the time, never having seen anything like it. You could play games—on your TV screen?!

It was all so new that artists—creative people—were needed not only help sell the titles, but to provide a narrative thread connecting us to these simple games. Art and design played a pivotal role in pulling wide-eyed kids like myself into the world of video games, then connecting those dots (almost literally) with the dots on screen. When I sat down with my joystick, I wasn't just a rectangle bouncing a ball against a wall of blocks, I was a marooned astronaut facing off against an otherworldly anomaly in deep space. These artists created something real with their paintbrushes and inks, ushering us into worlds filled with style, power, and beauty—creating a lasting emotional connection from gamers to the thrill of playing something like *Adventure*, *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian*, or *Yars' Revenge*.

These pieces of art are also fantastic works in their own right, and since they stand in for our bubblegum childhood days, there is an added emotional resonance that ties them forever to nostalgic moments and those pixelated adventures.

These creatives helped craft our relationships to the first home video games and Atari specifically. The Atari 2600 was one of the best-selling video game systems of all time, with an estimated 30 million units sold over the life of the

console. Because of its incredible reach and quality, Atari left its indelible mark on an embryonic industry, as well as in our collective pop culture consciousness. The original brand still stands for amazing fun, classic video games, and that category of "easy to play, difficult to master" gaming experiences. Atari and its associated memories are powerful stuff, and those of my generation who grew up with these games can now revisit those worlds, not just by playing the old games, but by entering into the work that tied us to them. With a lack of preservation process and decades of change for Atari, few of the original pieces of art still exist. My goal is to resurrect the best of Atari's art and design, allowing present and future generations to appreciate, understand and enjoy it.

This book is dedicated to those earliest video game pioneers who saw further afield than most of us and created worlds to stir the imagination. ■

Tim Lapetino
Chicago, IL
March 25, 2016

**"TWENTY YEARS AFTER PLAYING A 2600 FOR THE FIRST TIME, I STILL WONDERED—WHO WERE THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND THE ART AND DESIGN OF ATARI?"**


IF:
HISTORY
IF:

▶ Even though Nutting Associates didn't consider *Computer Space* a smash-hit, it didn't stop the company from releasing a two-player follow up game without Bushnell and his team.

# THE BIRTH OF ATARI

## ENGINEERING A DREAM

**IN 1968 TWO** engineers met at the Silicon Valley manufacturing company, Ampex. Sharing a cramped office intended for one, Nolan Bushnell, a newly-minted graduate of the University of Utah, and Ted Dabney, a straight-faced veteran engineer, began a friendship. They bonded over the Japanese strategy game, Go, playing during lunch breaks on a wooden board hand-made by Dabney. Ampex was one of the giants of Silicon Valley, a company known for its work in creating audio recording equipment, as well as the first videotape recorder. Its cutting-edge Videofile division was home to Dabney, Bushnell, and a host of other talented engineers—many of whom would use their experience in video technology to shape the early medium of video games. Bushnell was fresh talent at Ampex, but it seemed like he always had an eye out for something else. That something else came when he viewed one of the very first computer games, known as *Spacewar!*

Originally created by MIT students for the PDP-1 minicomputer, *Spacewar!* could only be played on large computers with specialized graphical displays—generally the province of researchers and academics on college campuses. *Spacewar!* gameplay consisted of players piloting small rocket ships, trying to shoot each other out of the sky, while navigating black holes and other variations. The game was simple but addictive, and Bushnell saw promise in the idea of creating a coin-operated version for the masses, if he could simplify the technology and produce it. During school holidays and breaks, he had worked at the Lagoon Amusement Park in Salt Lake City, Utah, which provided a first-hand education on the industry and environment of coin-operated games—pinball machines, strength testers, and other electromagnetic skill games. With hope in evolving technologies and just a rudimentary understanding of the engineering needed for such a product, Bushnell recruited Dabney to join him in this side project.

In 1970, the two formed a partnership they called Syzygy, a term that represents "the straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies."[1] The pair joined with fellow Ampex worker and computer programmer Larry Bryan, who would help build a proposed minicomputer version of the game they had in mind. Each was to contribute $350 to the company at the outset, but after the initial direction proved to be cost-prohibitive, the project shifted gears and Bryan's expertise proved unnecessary, leaving only Bushnell and Dabney.

That fall, Bushnell came to Dabney with a question, seeking to solve their basic challenge. Could they generate a dot on a standard TV and use something like the horizontal and vertical hold to move it around the screen? Dabney set about creating prototype circuitry, turning his daughter's bedroom into a workshop.

Before long, Dabney was able to cobble together a working prototype, and Bushnell had found a willing partner to license their game and provide the funds to finish its development. Nutting Associates, makers of the popular *Computer Quiz* game and other electro-mechanical games, was one of the few coin-op companies west of the Mississippi. Nutting would build and license the game from the pair, calling it *Computer Space* to fit within their existing "Computer" branded lineup. With that, the first commercial video arcade game went into production. When it was released in 1971, the game sold moderately well, with 1,500 units earning nearly $3 million in sales[2], which was average for a coin-operated game of the day.

It wasn't quite the breakout hit owner Bill Nutting or

THE NEWEST 2 PLAYER
VIDEO SKILL GAME

# PONG

from ATARI CORPORATION
SYZYGY ENGINEERED

**The Team That Pioneered Video Technology**


## FEATURES

- STRIKING Attract Mode
- Ball Serves Automatically
- Realistic Sounds of Ball Bouncing, Striking Paddle
- Simple to Operate Controls
- ALL SOLID STATE TV and Components for Long, Rugged Life
- ONE YEAR COMPUTER WARRANTY
- Proven HIGH PROFITS in Location After Location
- Low Key Cabinet, Suitable for Sophisticated Locations
- 25¢ per play

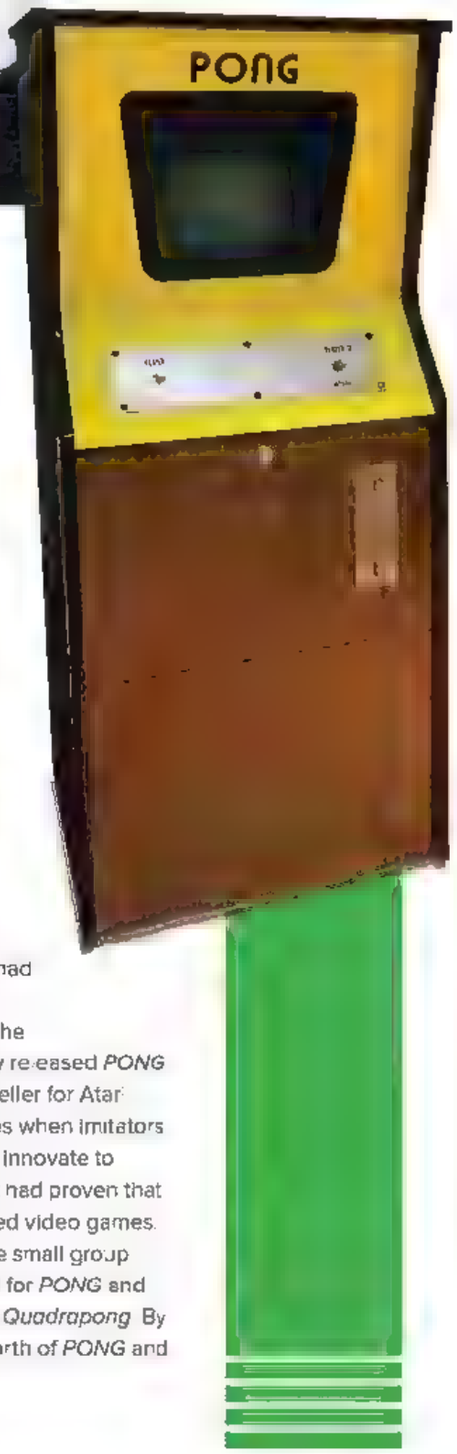
**THIS GAME IS AVAILABLE FROM YOUR LOCAL DISTRIBUTOR**

**Manufactured by**
ATARI, INC.
2962 SCOTT BLVD.
SANTA CLARA, CA.
95050

**Maximum Dimensions:**
WIDTH - 26"
HEIGHT - 50"
DEPTH - 24
SHIPPING WEIGHT
150 Lb


◂ Atari co-founders Ted Dabney and Nolan Bushnell, CFO Fred Marincic, and engineer Allan Alcorn

▾ An original *PONG* cabinet




Bushnell hoped for, but Nutting's penny-pinching ways might have handicapped the game's success, while also convincing Dabney and Bushnell that they'd have to move on if they wanted future games to be more successful. But the response did build confidence in the duo, affirming the belief they could create another game and make a go of it. Profits from *Computer Space* gave the pair enough money to leave Nutting Associates, set up an office, and begin work on their own. The Office of the California Secretary of State noted that their chosen name was already in use, so the two had to pick another official designation for their company. Their third choice was the name Atari, a term from the Japanese game of Go, making it official.

A lucrative development contract with the Chicago coin-op company Bally would give them the money to hire their first engineer, Allan Alcorn. Alcorn, who had worked with the pair at Ampex, was fresh out of school and working full-time there when he was wooed away by Bushnell, excited to work on something different. He said, "I did it because I was young, unmarried, and reckless—what the hell. I figured it'd cave in a year or two anyway and I'd go back to Ampex."[3]

Contracted to provide them with both a pinball game and a video game, Alcorn developed what would eventually be called *PONG*. The now-famous game began life as a warm-up project for Alcorn, based on a demonstration Bushnell saw of the first-ever video game console, the Magnavox Odyssey. Created by Ralph Baer, the "brown box" console played an assortment of games directly on a home television set, including a version of tennis that served as inspiration for the project. It was understood (at least by Bushnell) that this initial game was never meant for production. As soon as Alcorn had something workable, they would move on to a more commercial concept, presumably a racing game of some sort. But something funny happened along the way—the game was actually very playable. Alcorn's creative segmenting of the game's on-screen paddle to simplify the controls made the game engaging enough for a typical workaday crowd, in a way that the physics-heavy *Computer Space* wasn't.

The team set up their prototype unit at a local dive called Andy Capp's, and soon bar owner Bill Gattis called Alcorn at Atari when the machine stopped working, basically because of overplaying—the malfunction was its popularity! Famously, Alcorn once discovered that the *PONG* machine seized up because its coin mechanism was overflowing with quarters.[4] The team went on to build twelve additional full-size units—ten to put in locations for further testing, one for Bally, and another to keep in their office. The earnings at each of the locations were so outstanding that it was actually a problem for Bally, because they simply did not believe the quoted figures. Those at Bally were deeply skeptical of the numbers, which were far too high based on their experience—and this was after Dabney had already fudged the numbers lower!

Eventually, Atari decided to manufacture the units themselves, and in November 1972, they released *PONG* to the world. The game went on to be a bestseller for Atari and led to an explosion of arcade video games when imitators quickly jumped on board. Atari would have to innovate to continue its success, but their first hit product had proven that there might be a bright future for coin-operated video games. Things began moving quickly after that, as the small group experienced rapid growth due to the demand for *PONG* and its related follow-ups like *PONG Doubles* and *Quadrapong*. By the end of 1974, Atari had sold $3.2 million worth of *PONG* and

▲ Nolan Bushnell during an interview with *Play Meter* magazine, 1975

> **"I ALWAYS FELT TO RUN A GOOD COMPANY YOU HAD TO HAVE ROOM FOR EVERYBODY. YOU COULD ALWAYS FIGURE OUT A WAY TO MAKE ROOM FOR SMART PEOPLE. SO, WE DECIDED TO HAVE A NIGHT SHIFT IN ENGINEERING—HE WAS THE ONLY ONE IN IT."**

▶ Apple co-founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak founded Apple not long after Jobs left Atari

# THIS IS NOT A TOY.

## ATARI'S VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM IS SUPERIOR TO ANY OTHER SYSTEM BECAUSE IT GIVES YOUR CUSTOMERS MORE GAMES TO PLAY AND BETTER GAMES TO PLAY.

The fact is, we could have had a programmable unit a year ago. But we wanted our 1977 microprocessor based programmable system to have enough power so it would still be worth its stuff in 1983. Who needs a programmable unit this year that doesn't have enough power for next year's games. And we wanted a system that could handle the kind of sophisticated and intricate video games Atari is famous for, because the more fun we make our games, the more games you're going to sell.

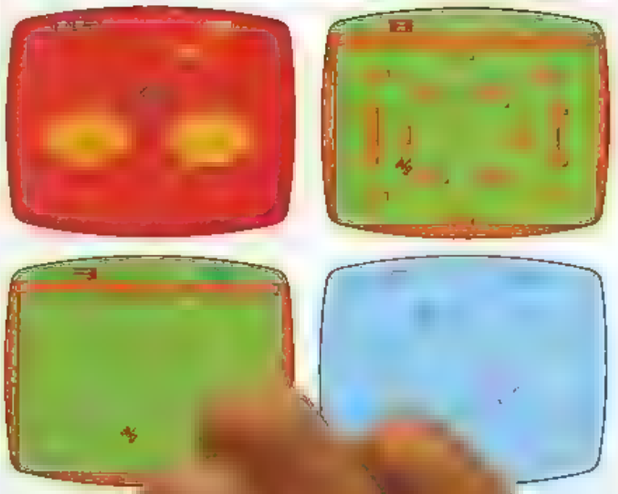
Since games are the name of the game, we pre-test our video games in consumer research studies, and we use our coin-operated game expertise to make sure we have the most challenging home television video games in the market place. That's what separates us from everybody else. Most companies don't realize that if a game isn't challenging, it isn't fun, and if it isn't fun, it isn't going to sell.

Right now, six Game Program™ cartridges, with different controllers for different games, are available with Atari's Video Computer System.™ We have Combat,™ Indy 500,™ Space Mission,™ Video Olympics,™ Street Racer™ and Air-Sea Battle.™ After Christmas, we plan to introduce one or two new Game Programs every month.

Every one of our Game Programs has fourteen to fifty game variations. No one else in the industry can say that. No one else in the industry has even half as many game variations per cartridge.


*In the beginning, we created six Game Programs. But, there's a lot more to come.*

▸ Retailer-focused advertising promoting the launch of the Atari VCS in summer of 1977

*Left corner—A flip of the Handicap Difficulty Switch and suddenly an ace bomber is a rookie again.*

*Center— The Combat Game Program is packaged with every Video Computer System. There are 27 action-packed game variations including Bi-plane,™ Tank Pong,™ and Jet Fighter.™ It's a fight to the finish battle in living color.*

*Lower left—Rugged remote control paddle controllers are available with the Video Computer System.*

# THE CORPORATE STRUCTURE OF WARNER LED TO FEWER "BET THE COMPANY" DECISIONS—THE KIND WHICH ATARI WAS REPEATEDLY BUILT ON.

corporate culture. However, Kassar did understand how to utilize marketing, optimize manufacturing, and develop the company Atari had evolved into. The leaner Atari would now enter what is widely-considered its golden age, with a string of successes in both hardware and software.

While the VCS continued to develop as a moderate success, internal issues became paramount, as programmers became frustrated with Kassar's management and disputes over credit and game royalties. David Crane, Alan Miller, Larry Kaplan, and Bob Whitehead, four of Atari's talented VCS programmers, dubbed the "Gang of Four," were rebuffed after bringing their concerns to Atari management. Taking a daring leap, the quartet left to form their own software company, Activision, and began creating competing games for the Atari VCS. They became the first "third party" publisher in video game history, though they wouldn't do it without a bumpy ride. Atari's response came in the form of a lawsuit directed at Activision, accusing them of copyright and patent infringement. "Atari bought full-page magazine ads to try to paint us as criminals, when all we were doing was pursuing our chosen craft," David Crane recalled.[7] The lawsuit dragged on for nearly two years, and was eventually thrown out by a judge. A licensing agreement was put in place between Atari and Activision, and the legal decision allowed anyone to create games for Atari's console, a crucial detail that would eventually play a part in the company's downfall. Activision's first games, including *Boxing*, *Bridge*, *Checkers*, *Dragster* and *Fishing Derby*, were released in 1980.

That same year, Warner's patience and commitment to the 2600 finally paid off with the release of the console's "killer app," a home version of *Space Invaders*, the wildly-popular arcade title. The system took off, quadrupling in sales. On its way to iconic status, this success seemed to validate Kassar's long view of the company. Warner had taken the time and energy to invest in developing the consumer brand, supporting it with strong marketing and quality games. From an engineering standpoint, the 2600 was already outdated technology, but the consumer market had finally caught up with its original vision. That year Atari would represent one-third of Warner's total annual income and become the fastest growing company in American history.

But along with that sort of stratospheric success came high expectations, and neither Atari (nor the video game industry itself) would be able to sustain the same level of growth. Shortages of both consoles and games plagued retailers in 1980 and 1981, and as video games exploded, stores were forced to ration product to keep enough inventory for the huge Christmas buying season. After ramping up production, Atari encouraged retailers to order for the entire year at once, and those orders (not actual retail sales) generated a false impression of huge sales, when actually it was just the opposite.

In 1982, financial analysts began warning of a market bubble. Within Atari, actual sales slowed and both distributors and retailers were still flush with product. The third party video game market also exploded, flooding the market with dozens and dozens of choices for unsuspecting consumers—some good, and many poor. When financials were announced in December, Atari's sales numbers had fallen far below expectations, angering Wall Street analysts. Warner stock dropped precipitously, and kicked off a video game industry bloodbath. Compounding this were a number of high-profile missteps, including the poor critical reception of highly anticipated home titles like *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* and *Pac-Man*, just as the financial issues were coming to light. The industry's largest player was the engine that powered the North American video game market, and Atari's huge stumble sent shock waves through it, which killed companies, canceled products, and caused rounds of layoffs both inside and outside of the company.

After another year of struggles, historic losses, and a failed takeover attempt by Rupert Murdoch, Warner decided to cut bait and sell Atari in 1984. Not finding one single buyer, Warner head Steve Ross decided to divide the company, with the Consumer Division sold to former Commodore computer founder Jack Tramiel, as part of his new company, Atari Corporation. The rest of the original Atari, including the Coin-Op division, was promptly rebranded as Atari Games Inc., and would remain in control of Warner through the year. After selling controlling interest of Atari Games to longtime arcade partner Namco, the original heart of Atari Inc. would last for two more decades (and several name changes) before closing down in 2003. Tramiel's Atari Corporation would go on to release the 7800 ProSystem, additional consoles, computers and many other games, but neither company would ever equal the success of the original Atari Inc. Those brightest chapters were squarely in the rear-view mirror, now just a part of the company's history. ■

**▶ Atari assembly line workers package the Sears branded Atari VCS, dubbed the Cartridge Tele-games System Video Arcade**


ART
& DESIGN

▶ Early dealer-focused launch ad for the second wave of Atari's VCS games


# THE IMAGINATION GAP

## THE ROLE OF ART AND DESIGN IN EARLY GAMES

**DESIGN WAS AT** the root of Atari's success, even from its earliest days. What began as a scrappy Silicon Valley startup with Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney at the helm grew to pioneer the new industry of video games. Atari organically developed a way of thinking about electronic games that the company called "Innovative Leisure" in its early marketing, as it capitalized on the growing ubiquity and availability of microprocessors to birth something unique.

While Bushnell didn't have the technical chops his collaborators did, he did have a panoramic vision for electronics as entertainment, and for connecting people. This wasn't purely about technology and innovation, this vision was about designing fun experiences. Engineer Al Alcorn elaborated: "Nolan didn't want to define us as the best coin-op game designer and manufacturer; instead he focused broadly on the entertainment business. We were creating new, disruptive products in the leisure industry. Nolan figured people would spend more money on what they wanted, not what they needed."[8]

This ethos came through from the earliest days of Atari, and Bushnell explained that their approach was necessarily rooted in creative thinking and design as a competitive advantage. "We started out as the smallest and weakest with no factory," he said. "We were outgunned everywhere, except for creativity and design."

With Atari making the transition from a Wild West of bars and taverns to wood-paneled living rooms across America, it needed an evolutionary approach. When Atari created a dedicated Consumer Division, it required doubling down on the company's strengths in design. Along with continued technological breakthroughs, Atari would utilize art and design to take the company to the next level, both financially and creatively. After bringing its popular *PONG* game home with a series of standalone versions, the company also began work on a programmable game system, eventually called the VCS (Video Computer System).

When Bushnell sold Atari to Warner Communications in 1976, the company added Warner's financial might and marketing experience to an already-savvy art department. George Opperman had already built a strong Graphics department focused on Coin-Op, and had set the standard for the way arcade games were marketed, packaged, and designed. Some of those creative team members would make the switch to the newly-christened Consumer Division, while others were brought fresh into the offbeat work environment recognized today as distinctively Silicon Valley. In a world that is much more design-centric than it was 40 years ago, it seems only appropriate to unpack and understand the work and culture that gave birth to one of the superstar brands of the 20th century.

▲ Atari's Coin-Op Design Team (from left to right): Jim Arita, Roger Hector, Steve Hendricks, George Opperman, Gjalt Van Der Wyk, Bob Flemate, Evelyn Lim and James Kelly

> What we do becomes a reflection of how people see Atari in the outside world. No matter if it's a carton illustration or box design, our job is to grab the consumer's attention."
>
> **JOHN HAYASHI**

▲ Consumer artist Jim Arita

▲ Art director Bob Flemate

# DESIGN IN ITS DNA

**AT A TIME** when on-screen game graphics were much less sophisticated, Atari needed artwork and graphic design capable of stirring the imagination. "The games were simple so you had to create as much of the context with reality as you could," explained art director Steve Hendricks. "We had to implant the visual image in the gamer's mind. We would work with programmers who came up with the game concepts." Exciting advertising, contemporary package design and lush illustration would differentiate Atari and capture attention on store shelves, but this whole constellation of creative parts became more than just a way to move merchandise—it became a crucial aspect of the overall game experience. Box artwork often served as a player's first exposure to a new title, coloring her interpretation of the gameplay within. Art and design brought this first generation of home video games to life, allowing players to see more than just the simple pixels on screen. Hand-painted artwork allowed gamers to bridge an imagination gap. Instead of crude, blocky graphics, they could visualize gunfighters, space nebula, and roaring Indy cars—creating a rich imaginary world populated by fantastic characters and drama, a familiar doorway to enter this new world of TV bytes and pixels.

Intentionally or not, Atari's creative efforts wove a narrative thread with all of these disparate elements, which became more than the sum of their parts. And the home environment required a different approach than Atari's work in arcades. Art director James Kelly explained: "The artwork was totally different. Coin-Op was all about bold colors, silkscreened art, and attention-getting graphics. And the Consumer art was looser, using offset printing in full color, allowing you to paint it the way you wanted to. It was a broader, more artsy way of working."

Industrial designer and later head of R&D Roger Hector was one of a handful of employees who spent time in the Coin-Op, Consumer, and Research Groups, with a broader perspective on all. He echoed the importance of design and creativity in these new games: "In some ways, art and design were part of the complete package and were of a very high caliber. We were in a continuous state of evolution, and as the process of building game images became more elaborate, design became more important."

In many ways, Atari's success would echo years later in the design-centric approach of Apple Computer. Apple co-founder (and former Atari employee) Steve Jobs' commitment to beautiful design and evocative marketing (often at a high cost) would differentiate his company in its early days with the Apple II, and much later, with the game-changing iMac and iPod. As with Apple, Atari's commercial success and cultural influence owe as much to its emphasis on art and design as its technological innovations.

Bushnell put it in simple business terms: "Design is the best return on investment that you can have," he said. "It's virtually the same cost to build something pretty as something shitty. So why not make the world a better-looking place? Whether it's a box, a game—whether it's an object—pretty is better than ugly."

While Atari was carving out a new business model within an infant industry, it wouldn't journey into the world of design blindly. Strategic hires like George Opperman, James Kelly, and up-and-coming talents like Hiro Kimura, Warren Chang, and Gus Alen helped fill and diversify their creative ranks. While young, many of Atari's new creatives came from the worlds of advertising and design, allowing them to apply more conventional experiences in crafting brands to this upstart industry. They drew on the lessons taught by book jacket design, "big idea" advertising, consumer product design, and many others.

Early on, Bushnell realized that the mechanical coin-operated tradition provided a clue on how to differentiate the design and style of Atari. "The coin-operated business was built on garish, gaudy colors," he said. "I found that if we put a little refinement in the design of our cabinets, and made them more sophisticated, then all of a sudden the market got a lot bigger for us, because we were the only ones doing that. It was a differentiator for us, as well as a market expansion tool."

Bob Flemate, who would later become art director, succinctly explained the craft to *Video Games* magazine: "What we sell is what happens in our minds and comes out through our hands."[9]

Atari's creative teams began sketching out the playbook, gradually creating a new design language that carried through the entire life cycle of advertising, marketing, and sales. Inspiration came from a variety of media and product types, including record albums, paperback book covers, movie posters and home stereo equipment. Because video games exploded at the heart of pop culture, it only made sense that these artists would draw from adjacent areas. This resulting blend hardened over time into Atari's aesthetic, which not only solidified the company's brand, but ultimately earned it a place in America's pop-culture design vernacular.

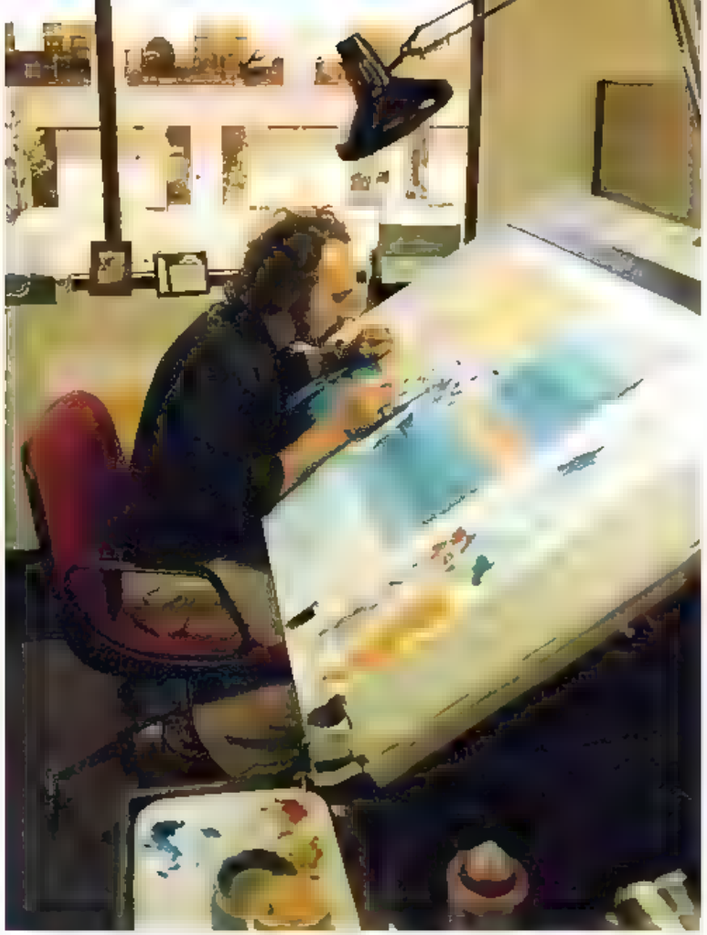
The brand matured just in time for Atari's rapid growth. With the Atari VCS finally hitting its stride with the release of its killer app in 1980, a home version of the popular *Space Invaders*, suddenly the demand for new games meant a spike in design and illustration needs, and the art department's small staff grew quickly. The group subdivided, with Evelyn

**BOX ARTWORK OFTEN SERVED AS A PLAYER'S FIRST EXPOSURE TO A NEW TITLE.**


▲ Ad featuring Atari's nine initial launch titles for the VCS

**ATARI WAS UNIQUE. AT THAT TIME, VERY FEW COMPANIES HAD INTERNAL ARTISTS, BUT WE HAD SO MUCH WORK TO DO THAT WE HAD A STAFF INSIDE, AND WE STILL HAD TO HIRE SOME OF IT OUT."**

EVELYN SETO



▲ Artist and art director James Kelly hard at work at his drawing table

▶ Eye-catching launch flyer for Atari's innovative music visualization console, the Video Music
Designers: Rich Silverstein, Gino Icardi
Photographer: Rudy Legname (Bozell & Jacobs/Pacific)

Seto managing graphic design while James Kelly managed illustration. John Hayashi headed graphics for the Consumer Division. In describing the team's role, Hayashi explained in a 1981 Atari newsletter, "We're mainly a wing of marketing. What we do becomes a reflection of how people see Atari in the outside world. No matter if it's a carton illustration or box design, our job is to grab the consumer's attention."

"Atari was unique," Seto explained. "At that time, very few companies had internal artists, but we had so much work to do that we had a staff inside and we still had to hire some of it out." Having a large art department meant that the creative process could be collaborative, but that it could also be immediate. Nolan Bushnell relished the chance to be inspired by the creative work around him. He loved to peek at works-in-progress, energized by the team's output. "I loved to go into the art department and see what they were working on," he said. "And in almost every case, I would get my mind blown—for the beauty and simplicity." Designer Roger Hector experienced this first-hand: "Early on, Nolan would come around after hours and steal drawings from my desk and take them elsewhere. He would show them to other people, and sometimes just look at them. Nolan and I became friends—he started by taking stuff off my desk."

While the general corporate culture of Silicon Valley tended to minimize the influence of creatives and their "soft skills," that trend began to change at Atari, as the company sought to integrate its design and engineering strengths. "Graphic artists were often left out of credits in the early days," said Hector. "We had a deep bench of talent including Jim Kelly, Evelyn Seto, Jim Arita, and others. Even George Opperman was a solid artist and a great art director. These guys worked every bit as hard and passionately as the engineers, and were commonly left out of the credits. But the times have changed [in video games], and at least now everyone gets acknowledged. Sometimes it's a cast of hundreds!" Atari leadership, and the organization as a whole, held art and design in high regard, which was nearly unheard of in the tech-centric Silicon Valley environment. This gave the fledgling company a distinct advantage that its competitors were never able to replicate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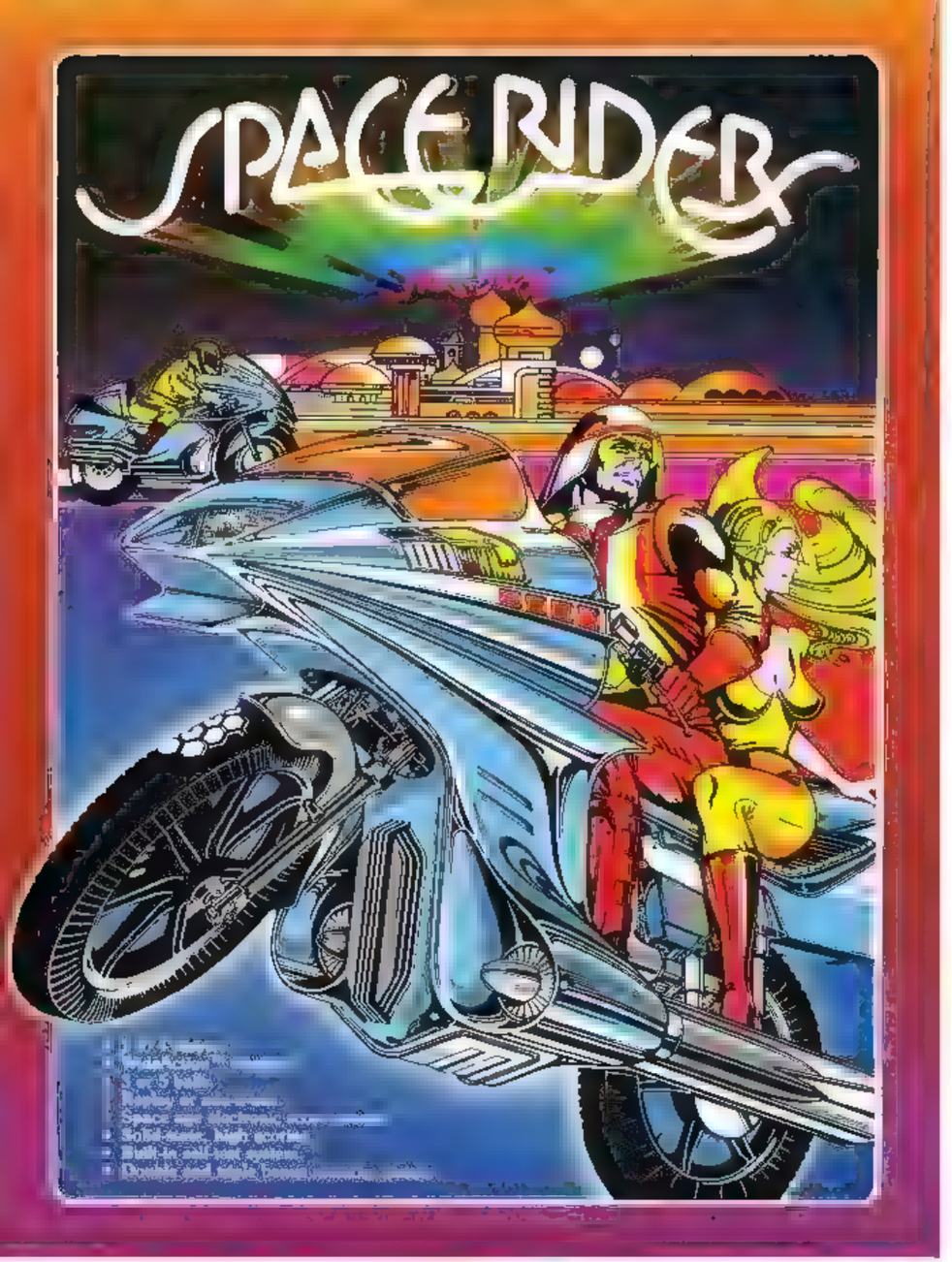
VIDEO MUSIC





◂ Flyers for *Space Riders* and *Airborne Avengers* (Pinball)
Artist: George Opperman

# BAY-AREA DESIGN CULTURE

**THE ATARI STYLE** of design and illustration didn't spring up like a lone flower in the desert, but instead grew out of several visual styles and movements that had percolated and grown natively in California—the Bay Area in particular. The psychedelic art movement in San Francisco was borne out of the counterculture of the '60s, most closely associated with mind-altering drugs like LSD and the underground music scene. Rock concert posters became the earliest canvases of this visual style, with artists like Rick Griffin, Victor Moscoso and John Van Hamersveld showcasing work that featured boldly-saturated colors vibrating in glaring contrast, as well as elaborate, ornate, distorted typography, and elements of collage. Drawing inspiration from Art Nouveau, Victorian art, Dada, and Pop Art, this indie style was soon appropriated by the music industry for vinyl record album cover design, and by the end of the '60s, had made its way into mainstream consumer marketing. The visual styles echoed an outsider perspective, free of constraints, concerns of legibility, and embraced a sea change in values and social mores that typified that generation.

The expressive lettering and bold palettes of this late 1960s work undoubtedly influenced designers like George Opperman, whose bespoke typography and color choices reflected a similar sensibility—highly-crafted linework coupled with raucous color. Opperman's typography veered into the ornate and curvilinear, and his designs consistently utilized the thicks and thins of multi-leveled line illustration, as well as highly-saturated, warm colors.

In parallel, the West Coast was home to the rise of supergraphics, a designation given to large-scale abstract designs that spanned large buildings, structures, and retail interiors. Designers of this movement (and architects) used these physical environments as a medium for communicating with enormous patterns and bold colors on interiors and exteriors. Designers like Barbara Stauffacher Solomon and Deborah Sussman (best known for her work on LA's 1984 Olympics) used scale to provide stunning visual stimulus, bending their designs around architectural details, walls, and other places. These simple shapes, deployed at billboard sizes, would draw the eye around corners and at odd angles in order to capture visual attention. These characteristics are present in much of Atari's early cabinet side art, which functioned in the same way, but on a slightly smaller scale.

▶ The typefaces Harry and Bauhaus were both used on Atari 2600 cartridges and packaging, sometimes interchangeably


▲ Glowing typography used on Atari 2600 packaging and promotional pieces


▶ Harry Fat 60pt AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlM

▶ Bauhaus Bold 36pt AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmN

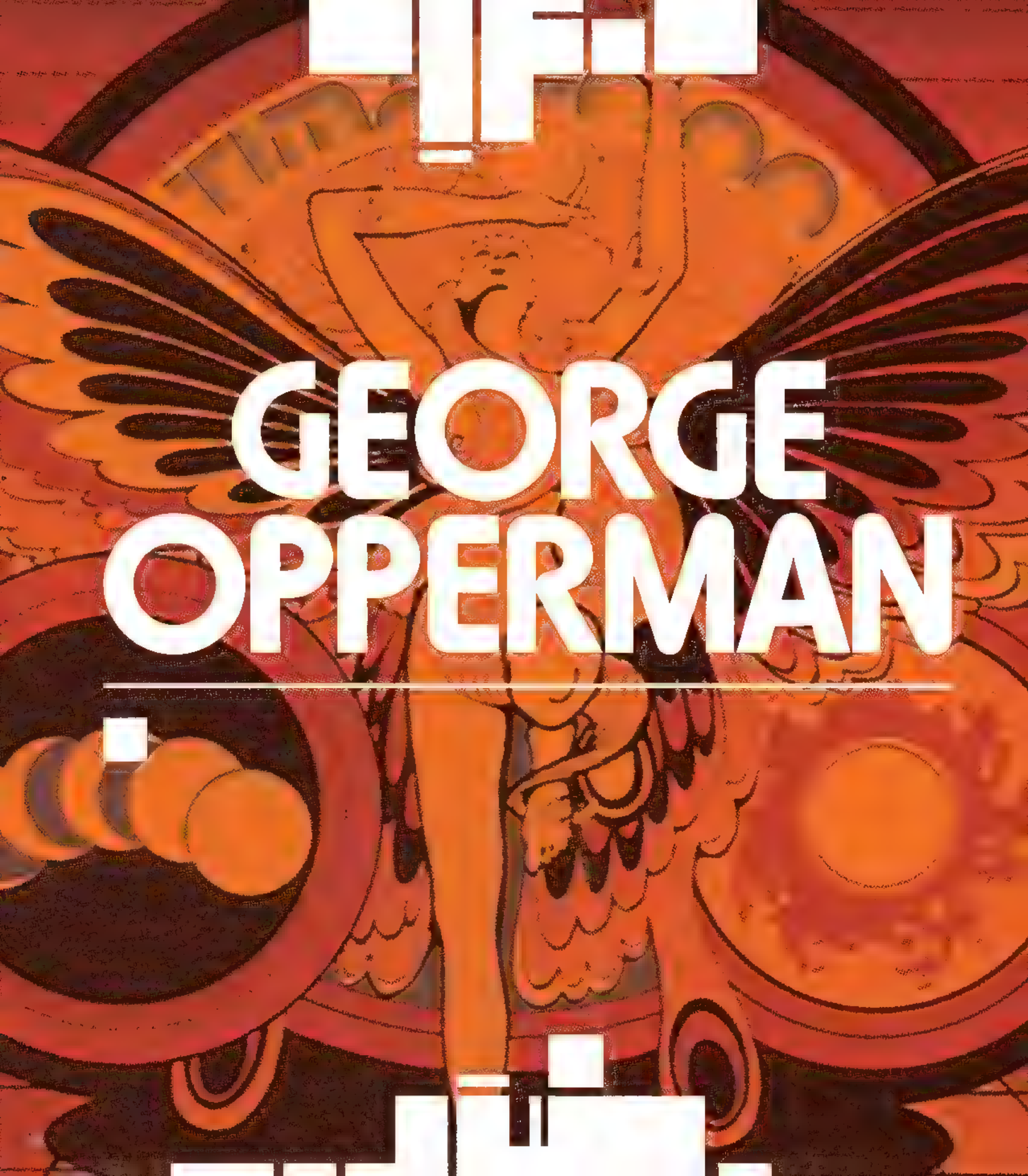
# TYPOGRAPHY

**AN ESSENTIAL PART** of developing a brand identity is the deployment of a cohesive system of lettering, or typography. As Atari moved further into the consumer products space, the company's visual identity became crucial in defining products as Atari's, and also to communicate a holistic look and feel.

The company's typography began with the logo designed by George Opperman in 1972. The wordmark of the logo was based on a version of a typeface named Harry. Created in 1966 by designer Marty Goldstein (with help from C.B. Smith), the typeface has a variety of friendly, curved edges and rounded forms, which contrast with its compressed and upright posture. Goldstein, born in Chicago in 1939, is best known for co-creating the *Creative Black Book*, an annual directory of artists and suppliers to the advertising industry. Goldstein was still a young designer, just six years removed from his time at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, when Visual Graphics Corporation (VGC) published the typeface, named after Goldstein's father, Harry.

The typeface also found its way onto the packaging of Atari's 2600 games—on cartridge labels, boxes, and instruction manuals. When displayed side-by-side, as in a retail location, the rainbow of colors and consistent design treatment form a unified whole of game titles. Atari's brand typography stands out and provides a binding consistency.

Another of Atari's workhorses was called Bauhaus. An iconic typeface, it was developed by Herbert Bayer of the legendary Bauhaus School in Dessau, Germany, in 1925. It features a rounded, sans-serif design whose forms were derived from the straight edge and compass. The typeface is mostly associated with Roaring '20s and Art Deco-era design, but it found new life in the 1970s. Ed Benguiat and Vic Caruso redrew Bauhaus for the International Typeface Corporation (ITC) in 1975, in part because its simple, clean lines and not-quite-closed counterforms make it noticeable when set in larger sizes. ■


GEORGE
OPPERMAN


▶ George Opperman reviewing backglass artwork with colleagues Evelyn Seto and Bob Flemate

# ATARI'S VISUAL SOUL

## CHAMPIONING POWERFUL DESIGN

**GEORGE HENRY OPPERMAN** was born on January 5, 1935 in Canada. A versatile artist, he studied fine art at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto, as well as graphic design and marketing at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1966, Noland Vogt, Dale Gruyé and George Opperman founded the design agency GVO (Gruyé-Vogt-Opperman, Inc.) in Palo Alto, California. Dale Gruyé was an industrial design engineer with Hewlett-Packard, and Noland Vogt an industrial designer hailing from recording equipment powerhouse Ampex. The two were friends at Art Center in Los Angeles, and were intent on going into business for themselves. Opperman joined them, and the three sought to build a hybrid firm that would combine graphic design and advertising with industrial design services. While this multidimensional business model would become more commonplace decades later, at the time the complex offering proved to be a financial challenge for the young firm. They struggled to turn a profit, and in 1971, Opperman allowed himself to be bought out and formed his own more focused firm.[10] Gruyé and Vogt rejiggered their GVO acronym into the Gruyé Vogt Organization. GVO narrowed its focus to industrial design, and would eventually become one of the first ID firms to blend engineers, researchers, cultural anthropologists, human factors specialists, and makers into an integrated design process.

Opperman then formed Opperman-Harrington, Inc. with Ursula Harrington, an associate from his time at GVO. The pair partnered at the small agency, where he met Evelyn Seto, who was later hired on as a production assistant. "The agency was very small," Seto said, "One writer, an art director, media buyer, a production manager, a front office person, and myself—a production assistant."

In that era, Silicon Valley was awash with non-consumer, technical companies developing components and parts for bigger clients. This wasn't the kind of sexy, famous work that larger San Francisco or New York ad agencies had much interest in. But smaller local firms picked up many of these

Detail of packaging art for *Super Breakout* (Handheld). Artist: George Opperman

**"HIS DESIGNS HAD POWER TO THEM. YOU COULDN'T IGNORE THEM, AND YET THEY WEREN'T INTRUSIVE. IT WASN'T ART FOR ART'S SAKE."**

jobs, designing for clients and trade publications. According to Seto, Opperman-Harrington was one of these of firms. She explained, "Companies like Fairchild Semiconductors, FMC, Ampex, Lockheed, Westinghouse, IBM, HP, Intel, and AMD were around. Regis McKenna [whose firm was instrumental in Apple Computer's early marketing and design] became a local agency powerhouse when he made companies like Intel interesting. I would not be surprised if video games didn't wake up the ad world and they came a-calling."

Seto, who would later rejoin Opperman at Atari, was directly involved with his initial Atari work during their time together at O-H. Atari design director George Faraco was instrumental in hiring Opperman and O-H, initially to work on logo concepts for the evolving Atari. Faraco, a designer himself, connected with O-H through his mutual friend, Dale Gruyé, both members in the local Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) chapter. Seto filled in some of the details: "George met and worked with Nolan around the time they decided to drop Syzygy from their original name to just Atari."

The now-famous Atari logo was created in 1972 under the purview of Opperman and his small team at O-H, with George Faraco providing creative direction and oversight on the Atari client side. After more than 150 logo concepts created over six months, Faraco recalled:[11] "I said, 'Yeah, it's this one.' And why I picked that one? It's because I have a pretty sophisticated artistic design sense! And that was the one that I knew was the winner."[12] Seto also had a hand in that original logo as well. "I inked the original," Seto said. "I inked it and hand ed the production." Atari engineer and employee number three, Al Alcorn, said that Atari had paid Opperman $3,000 for the logo.[13]

The creative partnership apparently worked well, as Opperman continued his relationship with Atari independently until 1976, when he folded Opperman-Harrington, and joined Atari full time. Opperman would prove instrumental in establishing Atari's visual brand and executing many of its classic arcade titles.

Faraco was gone by 1976, and Opperman then led the art department. His effect on the company was dramatic, owing to his leadership, nose-to-the-grindstone work ethic, and design skills. Seto elaborated, "George was an incredibly talented man. He could both design and illustrate, which is, in my mind, a rare combo. On a deep level, I think George was a nice man who lived and breathed design and graphics. He was a hard-working, intense man. I will say he was a perfectionist." He joined Atari as one of its more seasoned employees: he was 41, eight years older than Bushnell.

Bushnell deeply appreciated Opperman, and had seemingly found an experienced design and marketing hand

◂ Opperman with art director Bob Flemate, *Video Games* Magazine, June 1983

"At Atari, we like to think everything Industrial Design and Graphics do contributes to making every Atari game an adventure for the player."

GEORGE OPPERMAN

1981 ATARI PROMOTIONAL VIDEO

▾ Logo created for Atari's 10th Anniversary celebration
Artist: George Opperman

to help communicate a singular visual message for the young company. Bushnell elaborated on Opperman's design style: "He just had this simplicity—I like to think of him as the Matisse of Graphic Design. I loved working with him. It was one of these delightful things."

"One of the things that George did really, really well," Bushnell said, "is that his designs had power to them. You couldn't ignore them, and yet they weren't intrusive. It wasn't art for art's sake. It was a powerful communication of what was in store for you in the game. It made you want to play it. It was really communication through images. I always liked that about George, because you get a lot of designers who want to do pretty for pretty's sake, and you'll say what is your aim with this look? And they'll say 'Well, people will love this look,' and you'll say, 'No, what are you trying to communicate with this look? What are you trying to say?' I think an awful lot of designers get carried away with look and feel and forget that the primary job is communication."

▲ Opperman at his drawing table in a lighter moment

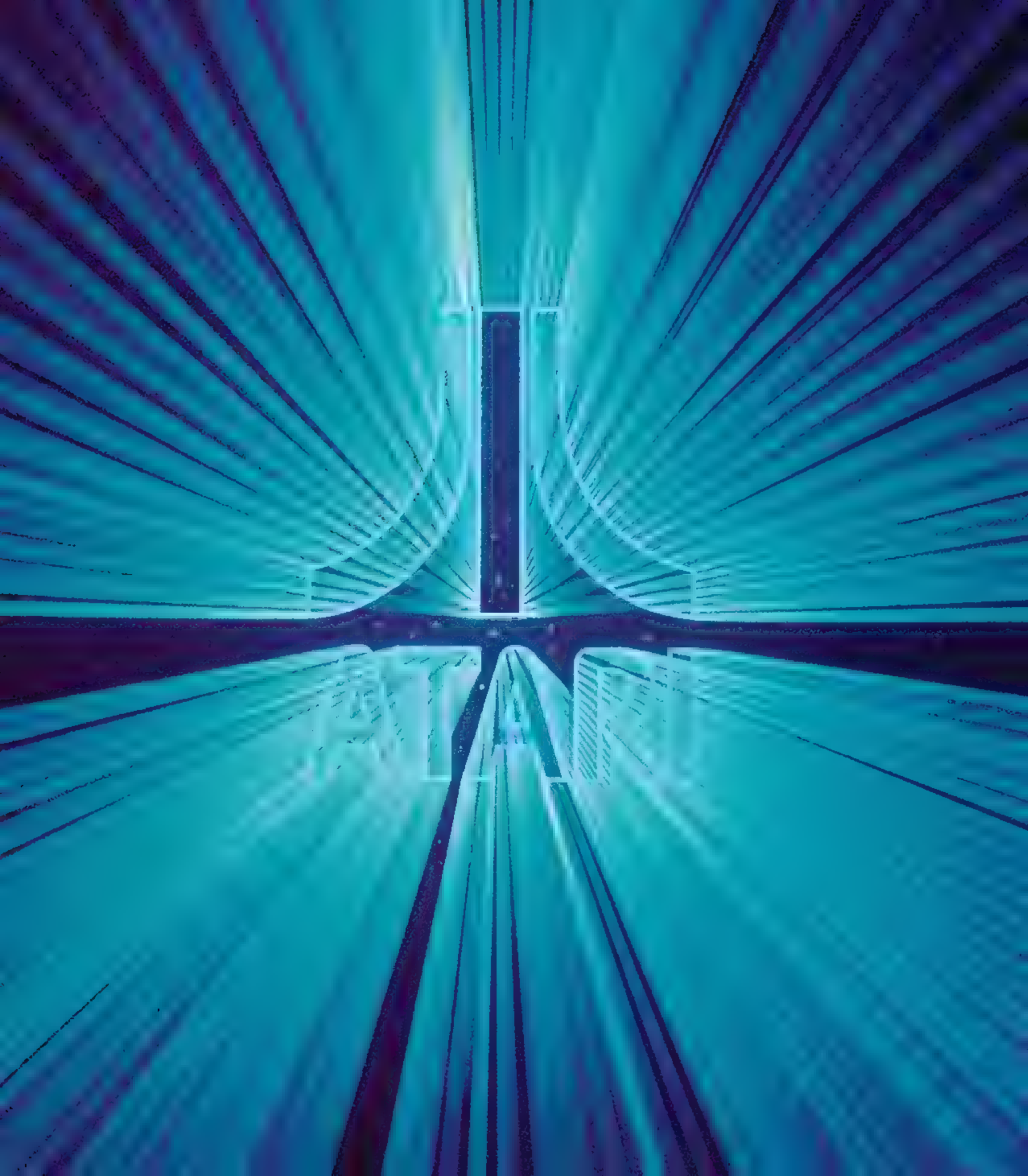
Precious little has been written about George Opperman, and his quiet personality didn't lend itself to grandstanding or bragging. In one of the few instances of discussing his approach, Opperman summed up his design philosophy this way in a 1981 internal Atari newsletter: "We are visual salesmen ... we collectively try to interpret both the quality and play value of every Atari game. Above all, graphics must attract the players and help them feel that every Atari game is an adventure."

Art director Steve Hendricks had more praise for Opperman. "He was an artistic dynamo," Hendricks said. "George was a workaholic, but was a super nice guy. When I think of him, I remember the smell of nicotine—he was a chain smoker. It was almost like he was a factory, churning out tons of wonderful creative in that smoke-filled office of his."

Roger Hector, who spent a year in Opperman's Graphics Group before moving onto industrial design and R&D work at Atari, appreciated what the art director brought to the table creatively. "George was the linchpin of the whole thing," he said. "He provided creative freedom and assistance when needed, and the art director quality of very high standards. I credit George with setting the standard and the tone for the group. It made it a pleasure. He was very well-liked, well-respected, and a very good leader of the group. He always had creative suggestions and ideas to make things better, but would allow the diverse talent of the team to express themselves. He didn't ride over you. He loved to get in there and do it himself, and was fully capable of doing it himself. That was back in a time when everything was hand-made in an old school, traditional way. I respected him greatly. He knew everything he needed to know to run this group and could do it himself. That combination worked well for everyone."

The head of Atari's Industrial Design department, Peter Takachi, remembered Opperman this way: "I was in constant


▶ This glowing, seemingly moving version of the Atari logo was created by Opperman for the cover of an Atari recruiting brochure



▶ Flyer art for *Time 2000* (Pinball)


▲ Opperman described this *Centipede*-themed poster aimed at arcade distributors to *Video Games* magazine: "It was unusual, to say the least, to be working with a girl in green greasepaint. And those models don't work cheap either. It's good, but it's definitely not what we would put out for the general public."

## FEW PEOPLE HAVE GIVEN AS MUCH OF THEIR LIFE TO A COMPANY AS GEORGE GAVE TO ATARI."

awe of his creativity and imagination," Takaichi recalled. "His work in graphic design and advertising/marketing really distinguished Atari from the competition. George worked incredibly hard. He put in long hours and routinely came in on the weekends. He demanded the best results from himself and from his staff. He was perfectionist, and work that was not done to his standards was redone, no matter the cost in time or money. George had the final say on everything that his group produced."

Fellow art director James Kelly remembered that Opperman also had a handle on the business side of keeping creatives challenged and appreciated. "Compared to a lot of other illustration jobs, we were paid well. It was always that way. That was George Opperman. That was his way. And he was a perfectionist, and that would drive you crazy, but it became the way we all worked."

However, Opperman's creative output and development of the Atari team wouldn't last. On November 27th, 1985, he passed away after a diagnosis of advanced lung cancer. On that day, Atari Games President Dan Van Elderen sent the following internal company email with the announcement of Opperman's passing. "Few people have given as much of their life to a company as George gave to Atari, and even fewer will leave behind the marks of permanence and beauty and art that George was able to leave."

Opperman's design style was as varied and unique as his skillsets. Not only was he an accomplished illustrator and painter, but also a strong designer, capable of bold and nuanced design work in logo and identity design. His typography tended to be bold, striking and expressive, sometimes bordering on the abstract. Emblematic of the times, his identity designs were balanced, visually layered, and often played fast and loose with letterforms, many of them bespoke. Nearly 40 years later, his work echoes the times, with an emphasis on emotive lettering, complex linework, and saturated color palettes. Within the confines of video games, one can see similarities in the approach to color and type in the work of Tom Kamifuji, another California designer best known for his series of colorful, screenprinted art. Kamifuji was also the package designer for Fairchild Semiconductor's Channel F video game system, the first removable cartridge-based console. (In an interesting case of interconnectedness, Kamifuji's work was also an inspiration for the rainbow stripes of Apple's iconic logo, designed by Carlos Perez and Rob Janoff at advertising firm Regis McKenna.)[14]

But these designers were not the only ones to tap into the developing zeitgeist of '70s California design—with its bold, colorful, overlapping outlined style showing up in everything from Heinz Edelmann's work on the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* film, to ABC's *Wonder Woman* television title sequence by Phil Norman.[15] ■


A New Pinball


2000

▶ Opperman reviews arcade silkscreen films with production supervisor Gjalt Van Der Wyk

# THE LOGO

## BEHIND THE FUJI

**ONE OF THE** most enduring pieces of graphic design to come from Atari is the company's logo itself. Long after Nolan Bushnell and his successors have moved on to other ventures, and the company itself has changed hands multiple times, the Atari logo, affectionately nicknamed "the Fuji," still persists as a lasting part of popular culture. More than 40 years after its creation, the logo still epitomizes retro video games, '70s/'80s pop culture, and the halcyon days of Atari's market dominance. Even today, teenagers wear t-shirts emblazoned with the logo, though most of them have probably never played an original Atari console. While other logo designs of the era—Carolyn Davidson's Nike "swoosh" or the Apple logo created at Regis McKenna—have spawned mythologies and lengthy design criticism, the origins of the Atari logo are still wrapped up in some mystery, adding to the mystique of its designer, George Opperman, and the iconic mark itself.

The facts we do know are here: George Opperman designed the logo for his clients at Atari, while working at his own agency, Opperman-Harrington Inc. Atari creative director

▼ These final Atari logo concepts by George Opperman were mounted on presentation board and submitted to Nolan Bushnell and others for selection

George Faraco and co-founder Bushnell were involved in the creative direction and final selection as well. But Opperman's creative process and actual intent are much less clear. In a 1983 interview with *Video Games*, Opperman explained the origins of the logo this way: "Symbols are just visual nicknames that combine first letters and interpretive design elements. I kept trying to stylize the 'A,' then I looked at *PONG*, their big game at the time. *PONG* had a center line and a force (the ball) that kept hitting its center from either side. I thought that (force) would bend the center outward. And that's what I designed."

This explanation was intended to solidify Opperman's intent behind the logo, but not all parties agree with the "official story." In other interviews,[16] Faraco insisted the logo had no such concept behind it, and suggested that Opperman imputed this explanation after the fact. "That's all utter bullshit," Faraco said. "It's just a design. There was none of that linguistic, storytelling crap. That's somebody's invention. He gave me a bunch of doodles, so I said 'Use this one,' and that was it."

For his part, Bushnell believes that Opperman purposefully offered multiple, conflicting origin stories for the logo—like the idea that it represented a Japanese character, or its similarity to the famous Mt. Fuji. Regardless of intent, the final version of Opperman's logo made its public debut in promotional materials and the cabinet for the arcade game *Space Race*, in 1973.

> **"I LOVED IT FROM THE DAY I SAW IT. THERE WAS NEVER ANY HESITATION."**
>
> **NOLAN BUSHNELL**

Bushnell recounted his own creative brief for the Atari logo: "I said, 'It has to be very simple. You have to be able to recognize it from one hundred feet away if it's on an 8x10 piece of paper, and it has to be easily reproduced on hats, t-shirts, or what have you. It can't have a lot of tiny lines—it has to be bold.' I loved it from the day I saw it. It was like 'That's it!' There was never any hesitation."[17]

The logo would go through changes and minor alterations in the years after Atari's sale, division, and subsequent changing of hands. But Opperman's version of the Atari logo once again graces products and merchandise today, and that mark is an indelible representation of the best of Atari. A. Alcorn detailed how efforts to refine Atari's visual image were underway, even just four years after the logo debuted: "When Warner Communications bought us in 1977, they said 'Well, we're going to putsch up your image,' so the first thing they did was do a survey to see what the impact of the Atari name and logo was, before they changed it, to get a reference. Turned out it had better brand recognition—this was in 1977—than Mickey Mouse. It was like 'What?!' So we had paid $3,000 for the original logo from [George] and they spent $100,000 to find out—don't fuck with it! So really, it became an icon, a worldwide icon, so that's cool."[18] ■

## ATARI LOGO EVOLUTION

1: Syzygy Engineering logo
2: Atari *PONG* cabinet logo
3: S/A Hybrid logo
4: New logo with S/A Atari typography on it
5. Final logo


1


2

3


4


5


COIN-OP

# FROM COIN TO CONSUMER

## DESIGN EVOLUTION BEYOND THE ARCADE

**ATARI MADE ITS** mark creating inventive, immersive arcade games, and the company never truly strayed far from those roots, for good reason. As Atari grew to include a slate of products aimed at the burgeoning consumer market, its design strategies would also evolve.

George Opperman and his team, paired with a strong cadre of young industrial designers, together defined a look and feel for Atari's arcade games, which would later mature into the signature visual language of Atari consumer products—consoles, cartridges and the like. But the creation, marketing and presentation of arcade games stood out in the industry—not just for game quality, but also for a commitment to high-end design and illustration.

In some ways, Atari's internal design group was part of a tradition that existed within the pre-video game coin-op world. "Part of what established a business style were the pre-existing pinball machine companies," Roger Hector explained, "and it's a very big process to create a set of pinball artwork. The backglass and all the pieces, the playfield and all of that—you can't really shop that out if you're Gottlieb or Bally. You build an in-house group. And Nolan and the gang—the executives at the time—they found that out. So, I think that was inspiration for them to take someone that they knew and respected—like George [Opperman]—and say, go do this. And George had a wide-ranging background that he brought to it, and managed to hire some really good people."

Arcade cabinets had multiple audiences: The "cabs" and their graphics had to be attractive enough to entice owner/operators to consider them, allowing these buyers to visualize each within their location as prospective income-generators. The final artwork and cabinet designs needed to speak to the other target audience—game players—often in visually busy or chaotic environments. Either way, it was crucial for both audiences to connect with the games in order to achieve the end result—players willing to walk up to a cabinet and insert a quarter.

Hector again laid out the landscape: "The arcades were the focus—games were bought by distributors and the distributors were a bunch of old dudes who had been around since the days of pinball. Their business started with pinball machines and jukeboxes, and they demanded a certain style of graphics—bright and colorful. And all of the games really had silkscreened graphics on the side panels that were generally bold colors to work in the street locations and the arcades."

▲ Atari Coin-Op sales team, 1979, left to right: Frank Ballouz, Howie Rubin, Sue Elliot, Don Osborne, and Tom Petit

How to build stronger arcade profits ten ways:

Atari. The Investment.

REPLAY - MAY 1978

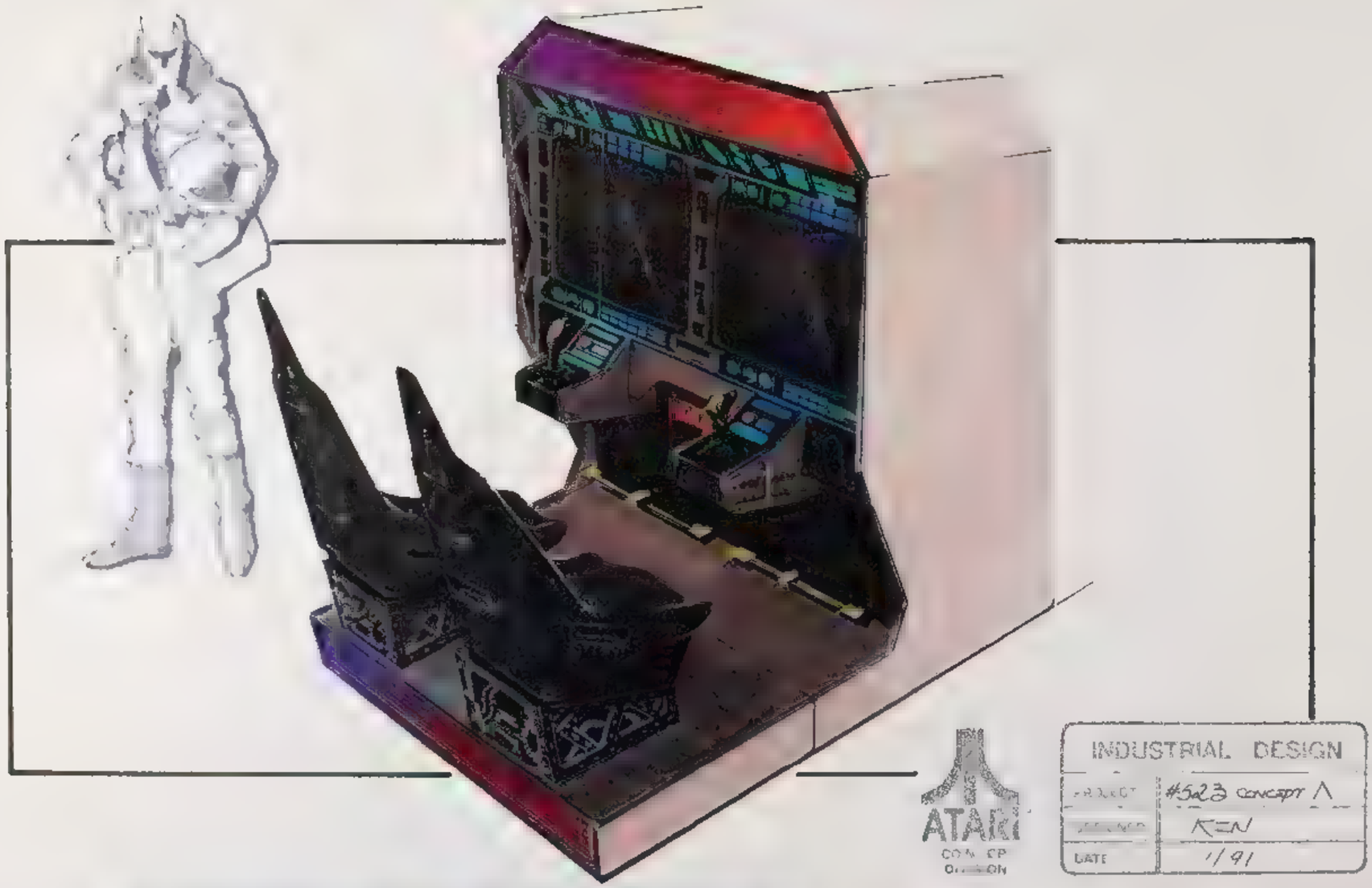
▲ Ad that ran in *Replay* magazine, focused on arcade owners


▲ The environmental cockpit style cabinet for *Pole Position II*

# CABINET ART

**PART OF THE** complete package that also included gameplay, attract screens, and physical design, cabinet art was one of the main on-site promotional tools used by designers to draw players in. Creative, large-scale artwork was not only important to set the tone for the game itself. It also helped distinguish a game from other competitors. While cabinet art played an crucial role in the attractiveness of a game, industry designer Barney Huang admitted that eventually, the evolution of arcades meant changes for this work at Atari. "With coin-op, the arcade owners tried to pack more games into a small space to make more money," he said. "So these beautiful side graphics got lost as they packed them together. Eventually we standardized the cabinets more and more, so from a design point-of-view, there weren't a lot of challenges left."


▲ A photo used in the flyer for the arcade game *Gotcha*. The game's infamous controls were round, pink and dome-shaped—designed to suggest a woman's breasts. Soon after, arcade cabinets were retrofitted with more standard controllers.
Industrial Design: George Faraco

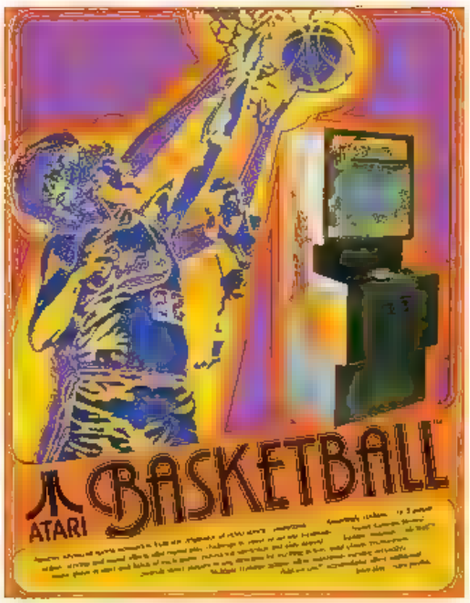



◀▲ Arcade cabinet design concepts were used to work through design challenges as well as promote new visual concepts
Designer: Ken Hata

Industrial designer Barney Huang laid out the team's general thinking on creating unique physical, arcade experiences: "When we did arcade cabinets, we asked, 'How do you make two dimensions interesting? What if we create 3-D vacuformed dimensional parts?' We had to keep coming up with something new. But in the end it was all about the quality of the software."

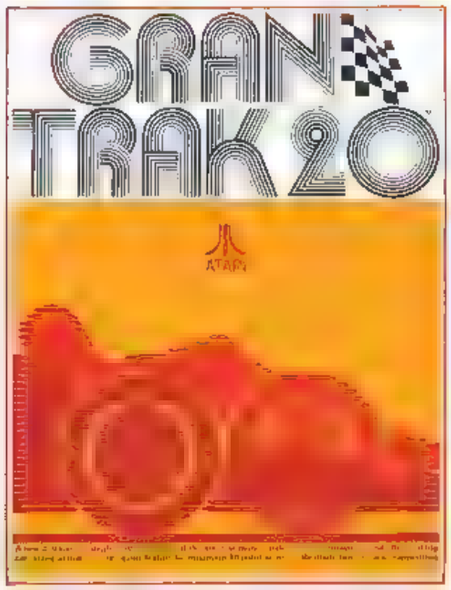
## FLYERS

**ARCADE FLYERS WERE** the standard tool of the trade to promote sales of arcade games. Atari's flyers were powerful representations—not only of the games, but also the overall game experience. While nothing could replace gameplay demonstrations or gorgeous side art, flyers played an important role in the sales process.

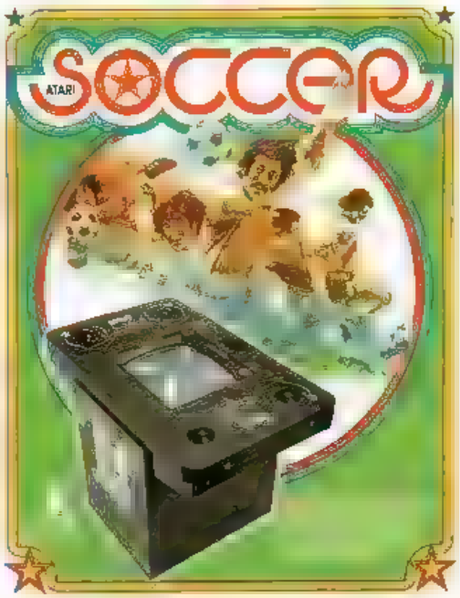

ATARI
BASKETBALL


GRAVITAR


ATARI


GRAN
TRAK 20
ATARI


PIN PONG

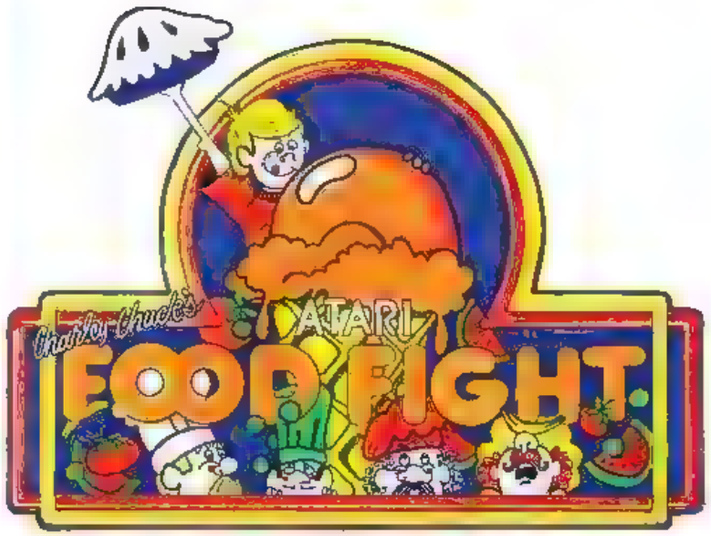

ATARI
SOCCER


AVALANCHE
ATARI


SUPER
ATARI

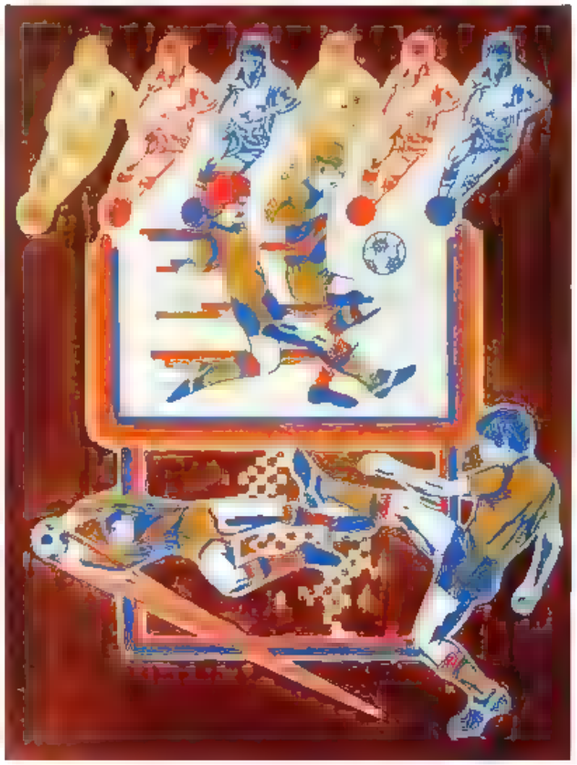

KEE GAMES


▲ Color rough coin-op flyer for *Star Wars* (Arcade)




▼▲ Color art for *Food Fight* marquee art and t-shirt graphics


▼▶ Cocktail cabinet side graphics for *Soccer* (Arcade)
Artist: Evelyn Seto




▶ Initial cabinet art concept for *Paperboy* (Arcade)


▲ Marquee artwork for *Solar War* (Pinball)
Artist: Bob Flemate

# EVOLUTION TO CONSUMER

**ART DIRECTOR AND** illustrator Steve Hendricks spent time in both Coin-Op and Consumer Divisions, and noticed a healthy influence of one group on the other. "Coin-Op really impacted the Consumer Group," he said, "in terms of gameplay, and of course, the graphics—it really inspired what happened in the consumer area."

Roger Hector, part of the Coin-Op team and later head of R&D, explained the shift taking place inside Atari. "In the early days," he said, "the Coin-Op group was the premier group, because you had dedicated hardware—a lot bigger proportional investment in creating a coin-op game than you did a consumer game. But eventually that flip-flopped, you know? When you can spend a fortune producing a cartridge, that was a much bigger investment than they could afford in coin-op. But in the beginning, it went the other way. The coin-op guys were the stars."

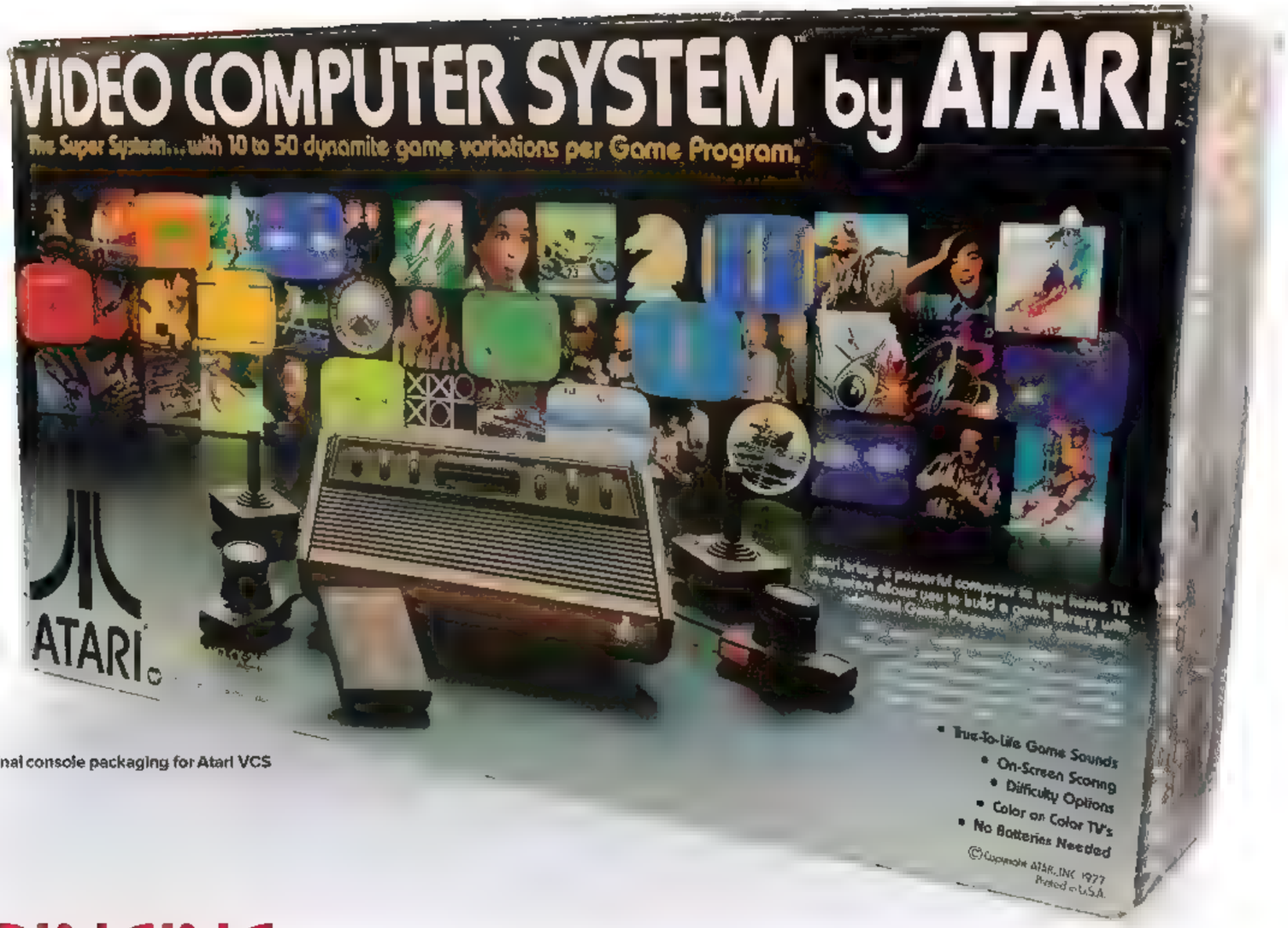
The audiences for coin-op and consumer-oriented games were different, as were the environments in which the end products lived. Atari's dedicated consoles, home consoles and game packaging lived in retail environments and store shelves, competing with the other products in that challenging space. The style of artwork necessitated an evolution as production requirements and audience needs shifted as well.

"The artwork was totally different," noted Consumer art director and illustrator James Kelly. "Coin-Op was all about bold colors, silkscreened art, and attention-getting graphics. And the consumer art was looser, using offset printing in full color—allowing you to paint it the way you wanted to. It was a broader, more artsy way of working." Industrial Designer Barney Huang agreed. "You went from only using so many colors, the restrictions with the arcade games, but now you could do full-blown illustrations. You had complete freedom."

Hendricks, for one, embraced the change in working style that went hand-in-hand with his move to work on consumer design. "We didn't have to pick a very specific style," he said. "It was pretty cool too, because we weren't limited by the technology any longer—coin-op was silkscreen, and you could only do certain things. And really, the direction we took with the art was to make it an inspiration for that game title. Obviously, what you saw on the screen wasn't even close to what the graphics on the covers looked like. But it didn't matter!"

"We were making it up as we went," Hector said. "One of the things that helped a lot was that Atari was making a lot of money! There was a gigantic fire hose of money being sprayed into the building constantly, so more traditional businesses would be a little more cautious about budgeting things and that sort of thing. Hell no! Not at Atari! And if you ever wanted encouragement to just go do it, it was the senior staff. Nolan, for one, would say—'Go do that!' And he didn't even ask what it would cost. That was really a kind of carefree, 'We're the kings of the world and we don't even know what we're doing!' sort of attitude." ■

# HOME CONSOLES




▶ Original console packaging for Atari VCS

# BRINGING THE ACTION HOME

## THE PROMISE OF A VIDEO GAME LIVING ROOM

**HOME CONSOLES WERE** born from the promise of bringing arcade-like video game action to the living room. Atari's creatives took the experiences gleaned from their arcade successes (and failures), translating them into a home system. The result was a series of products, each with its characteristic design style, personality and features. These early video game consoles were but the first wave of consumer electronics that have taken up permanent residence in our daily lives.

▲ Interior manual art for Atari VCS (2600)
Artist: James Kelly

1977

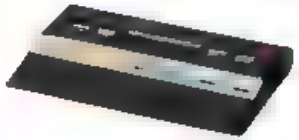
# ATARI 2600

VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM (VCS)

## A CULTURAL ICON AND ATARI'S BEST-SELLING CONSOLE

**ATARI'S FIRST PROGRAMMABLE** [illegible]

ATARI 2600 "VADER"



ATARI 2600 JR.

ATARI 2800/VIDEO ARCADE II

1982

# ATARI 5200

SUPERSYSTEM

## THE HIGH-DESIGN ARCADE MACHINE FOR THE HOME

**THE 5200 SUPERSYSTEM** [illegible]

1986

# ATARI 7800

PROSYSTEM

## THE RIGHT CONSOLE AT THE WRONG TIME

**ATARI'S 7800 PROSYSTEM** [illegible]

1987 1989 1999

ATARI
# XE
## VIDEO GAME SYSTEM

### A HYBRID PC AND GAME SYSTEM BUILT FOR COMPATIBILITY

**THE ATARI XE** [illegible]

Lynx I Prototype

Lynx II

ATARI
# LYNX
## THE FIRST HANDHELD WITH 16 BITS OF COLOR LCD POWER

**THE ATARI LYNX** [illegible]

ATARI
# JAGUAR
## THE WORLD'S FIRST 64 BIT CONSOLE WAS ATARI'S LAST

**THE ATARI JAGUAR** [illegible]




▲ Silver Atari packaging suits that replaced Atari's earlier colored game boxes and dark console packaging. These designs were also intended to differentiate Atari's separate console lines.

# VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM™ by ATARI®

The Super System... More Games, More Fun.


▲ Internal Atari photo of *Stunt Cycle* (top) and *Video Pinball* dedicated consoles

▶ Launch advertising for *Video Pinball* and *Stunt Cycle*

# DEDICATED CONSOLES

**BEFORE ATARI RELEASED** its first home console, it also designed and developed a line of dedicated consoles, game systems that kicked off the consumer video game market. The first of these was a home version of its popular arcade game, *PONG*, released under partnership with Sears. Atari's own branded *PONG* unit followed, as well as a string of *PONG* sequels, and a few other consoles and handheld units.

SEARS TELE-GAMES PONG ▪ PONG ▪ PONG DOUBLES
SUPER PONG ▪ SUPER PONG TEN ▪ SUPER PONG PRO-AM
SUPER PONG PRO-AM TEN ▪ ULTRA PONG
ULTRA PONG DOUBLES ▪ VIDEO PINBALL ▪ STUNT CYCLE
VIDEO MUSIC ▪ HANDHELD TOUCH ME

▼ Promotional photography of Atari's *Super PONG* dedicated console

▼ Atari's *Touch Me* handheld game, released in 1978. This game was based on the Atari 1974 arcade game of the same name, but was much less successful than another re-imagining of the arcade game. Ralph Baer, inventor of the Magnavox Odyssey video game console, adapted the arcade game into *Simon*, the popular tabletop game that is still in production today.



▲ Packaging for the Atari-branded home version of *PONG*

# BOX ARTWORK


# FROM PIXELS TO PAINTBRUSH

## CROSSING THE IMAGINATION BRIDGE

**ATARI'S CONSOLE GAME PACKAGING** stood out on the shelves. Rows of boldly-colored boxes were crowned with expressive, hand rendered illustration. Each piece of cover art served as a clue to the contents within, a kind of portal into the electronic, television game world.

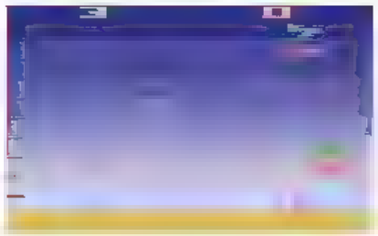
While box artwork played an important role in the sales process (package designers call it "shelf appeal"), it also served a different, less-obvious function. In the early days of home video game consoles, Atari's evocative artwork set the stage for the gaming experience. It helped gamers dream up an environment in which their pixelated adventures would play out. The art was a crucial connection point for the moment when a cartridge slid into the console, the power toggle was flipped on, and the TV hummed to life.

None of Atari's artists or designers were experts in video games, as the industry was still in its infancy. But they each tapped into a well of human experience that, coupled with some amazing games, left an indelible mark on a generation of players. Their stories are declarations of craft and concept that helped illuminate a neglected corner of creativity in the early video game world.


▲ Game packaging for *Air-Sea Battle* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

I painted it to look dimensional, rather than actually cutting up the art, like we did with the first game art in *Combat*."

**CLIFF SPOHN**



## AIR-SEA BATTLE

One of the original nine VCS launch titles, *Air-Sea Battle* features a variety of one and two-player military bombardments, featuring aircraft, submarines, destroyers, and blimps. The game served as a sort of shooting gallery, with more than two dozen game variations. It was also renamed *Target Fun*, serving as the pack-in game for the Sears Tele-Games version of the console.

▼ Game packaging for *Basic Math / Fun With Numbers* (2600)
Artist: Susan Jaekel


## BASIC MATH/ FUN WITH NUMBERS

*Basic Math* (or its alternate title, *Fun With Numbers*) was an attempt to bring some educational fare into Atari's lineup of game cartridges. It is simple in delivering math problems, and announcing a little musical cue for right or wrong answers. Box artist Susan Jaekel's artwork injects more fun and whimsy into the title than it probably deserves. Jaekel recalled, "This was my first piece for Atari and the most fanciful and loosest in style—the '70s vibe."

The Atari art directors pretty much gave us creative freedom to come up with the image ideas. On *Black Jack* I based the layout around the playing cards, illustrating part of the playing card along with happy people that would be seen in a casino."

**RICK GUIDICE**

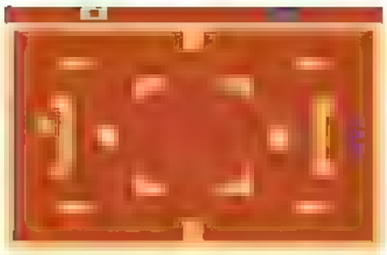

◂ **Game packaging for *Black Jack* (2600)**
**Artist: Rick Guidice**

## BLACK JACK

This game was Atari's representation of the classic card game, blackjack. Though simple and minimal, in both its graphics and sound effects, the game delivers a relatively authentic (if slightly stripped down) gameplay experience. And it replicates one of the truths of blackjack precisely—the house usually wins! This game was later discontinued after Atari released its *Casino* cartridge, which contained multiple card games, including blackjack.

They wanted to cut it up [the different sections] and I didn't like that. The jet trail is cut, and it always really bothered me that the rocket's trail goes from one level to the top level."

**CLIFF SPOHN**



## COMBAT

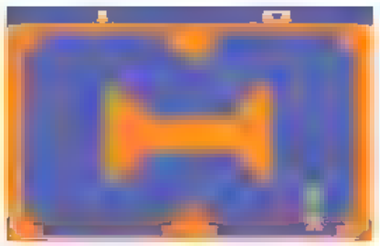
This classic game of two-player warfare is still one of the most enjoyable 2600 titles. Based on two of Atari's mid-'70s arcade titles (*Tanks* and *Jet Fighter*), *Combat* sports 27 variations on head-to-head action, with each battle simulation—tanks, biplanes or jets—lasting two minutes and sixteen seconds, and the highest scorer winning the round. *Combat* was the original VCS pack-in title, and one of the most common cartridges found in collecting circles.


▲ Game packaging for *Combat* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

▲ Cover art for *Indy 500* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

▶ Detail of *Indy 500* cover art
Artist: Cliff Spohn

# INDY 500



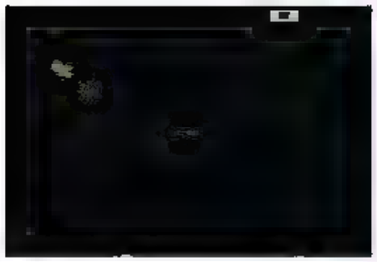
A home version of Atari's groundbreaking multi-player arcade games, this racing game recalls the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Unique among Atari driving games, it came bundled with the exclusive Driving Controllers, a set of single, spinner-style controllers used only for this game. The Driving Controllers look identical to Atari's Paddle Controllers, but allow 360 degree movement. *Indy 500* affords single-screen racing on a variety of tracks and surfaces (like ice), and has a ton of replay value


32
33
3

This was loosely based on *Star Wars*, and I really liked John Berkey's sci-fi art. I've always been a sci-fi junkie, so that's one of my fantasies. I used big stripes and I think I put them all on the fighters so they'd have the same markings. I've always liked designing things like this."

**CLIFF SPOHN**


▶ **Game packaging for *Star Ship* (2600)**
**Artist: Cliff Spohn**

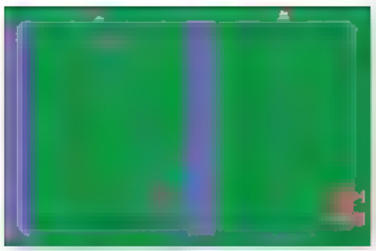


## STAR SHIP

One of Atari's earliest space shooters, this game centers around a first-person cockpit perspective, based on the 1977 arcade game, *Starship 1*. As the player, you target a variety of asteroids, star fighters, flying saucers, and space robots for the highest score.

Doing *Street Racer* was an opportunity to do some hot rods with a '50s type street drag, and a so introducing other types of racers, such as sports cars and motorcycles. I had fun giving a blurred appearance of speed to some of the images."

**RICK GUIDICE**



## STREET RACER

Using the Padd e Controllers, the player controls an automobile, trying to dodge cars to score po nts against an opponent. The game's split screen action al ows dueling drivers to keep an eye on each other while avo.d ng oncoming traffic. *Street Racer* drew from Atari's earl er environmental arcade game, *Hi-Way*


▲ Game packaging for *Street Racer* (2600)
Artist: Rick Guidice

▲ Cover art for *Surround* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

# SURROUND

This early game pits player versus player, and as each opponent's square travels across the screen, it leaves a trail of unbreakable tracks in its wake. The tracks serve as walls used to block, surround, or cut off the opponent and gain points. Much like the classic light cycle battles in the sci-fi movie *Tron*, *Surround* has variations that keep it fresh, and echoes the gameplay of the very first "snakes" arcade game, *Blockade*, by Gremlin.

# VIDEO OLYMPICS

*Video Olympics* would be more accurately described as *PONG Olympics*, since this game features 50 variations on Atari's original, classic ping-pong style game. Different styles of play, 4-player modes, and additional ball english make this game an interesting evolution from Atari's early history


It was difficult to try and design these with all the arms and legs and still keep it together. Everything ties in with something else, and I tried to create 'carry-through' lines and wire everything together. It's easier and more fun to use montage. I wanted to show blurring balls and motion lines."

**CLIFF SPOHN**

◂ Game packaging for *Video Olympics* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

**CLIFF SPOHN'S WORK**
STANDS OUT NOT JUST FOR ITS QUALITY EXECUTION, BUT ALSO FOR ITS STRONG DESIGN SENSE.

POWERFUL COMPOSITIONS AND EFFECTIVE USE OF MONTAGE ALLOWED HIS WORK TO TRANSCEND FLATLAND INTO THREE DIMENSIONS.

▸ This wizard piece mentions a variety of early Atari 2600 artwork and visual libraries from previous games into one appealing montage. The image was used in POP (point of purchase) displays in stores, as well as on Atari's game catalogs, and a dry erase scoreboard sent from Asphalt Magazine.
Artist: Cliff Spohn

# CLIFF SPOHN

**BORN AND RAISED** in Oregon, Cliff Spohn was constantly drawing from an early age, sketching through his teenage years—hot rods, airplanes, girls, and *Mad Magazine* characters. He received his BA in illustration and graphic design from San Jose State College in 1973.

In 1976, Spohn chanced upon the artwork that would alter the trajectory of his career. "I saw the art of David Grove in a gallery window in San Francisco," he explained. "I saw how loose it was and how you could see the pencil lines. I knew this was the direction I wanted to go. It floored me! I never met him or talked to him. I didn't know my ass from fifty cents on how to do this stuff, but I went home and tried to figure out how to get that kind of wash and type of texture."

"From that point on, I never stopped working. This was a very popular style at the time and I had to teach myself how to do it. It lent itself to editorial and advertising work as well."

In 1977, Spohn began working as a freelancer for Atari through the Palo Alto-based agency, Steven Jacobs Design, and then eventually on his own. "The work was more of what I wanted to do, and Steve art directed me a little bit," Spohn said. After the initial creation of artwork for *Air-Sea Battle* and *Combat*, Spohn went on to create the art for many of the other initial 2600 launch titles, and nearly 20 other games, defining the illustration style for Atari's home consoles.

Fellow illustrator Steve Hendricks explained about Spohn, "He was an icon around here. He came up with the look. Our task was to emulate what Cliff was doing, and Cliff was amenable to giving us trade secrets, but the way he did it was the way Atari packaging needed to look."

Spohn's work stands out not just for its quality craft and execution, but also for its strong design sense. Powerful compositions and effective use of montage allowed his work to transcend flat and into three dimensions. "To me, designing is standing on one foot," he mused. "I always want to keep the viewer off-balance, moving, with asymmetrical imagery, on the edge." He described the technique on his Atari work as "anti-painting," where "It's really the opposite of painting, because you lay in a

AIR-SEA BATTLE ▪ BACKGAMMON ▪ BASKETBALL ▪ BOWLING ▪ BRAIN GAMES ▪ BREAKOUT ▪ CHAMPIONSHIP SOCCER
CODEBREAKER ▪ COMBAT ▪ FOOTBALL ▪ HOME RUN ▪ HUMAN CANNONBALL ▪ INDY 500 ▪ MINIATURE GOLF ▪ STAR SHIP
SUPER BREAKOUT ▪ SURROUND ▪ VIDEO CHESS ▪ VIDEO OLYMPICS ▪ WIZARD

## TO ME, DESIGNING IS STANDING ON ONE FOOT. I ALWAYS WANT TO KEEP THE VIEWER OFF-BALANCE, MOVING, WITH ASYMMETRICAL IMAGERY, ON THE EDGE."

▶ Spohn's illustration for an early Apple Computer manual. His artwork was personally commissioned by Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.


wash, then use a bristled brush to pull off some of the color, then spray fix it so you don't pull off all the paint. But in the end, it's all about the composition, and that's the way I've always approached everything."

Spohn was heavily influenced by illustrator David Grove, but his work also referenced paperback book covers and album art. He worked as a freelance commercial illustrator even creating art for another tech startup, the brainchild of former Atari employee Steve Jobs. That company, of course, was Apple Computer. Spohn illustrated two of the company's early manuals, and Jobs loved the artist's work—he even had Spohn's original art hanging in his office! For his part, Jobs tried to lure Spohn away from his freelance work for Atari to a full-time position at Apple, including stock options. But Spohn turned down the offer, doubtful about the future of the fledgling computer company.

Atari art director and illustrator James Kelly praised Spohn: "He was a fabulous illustrator and had a nice, relaxed, editorial way of coming up with images. I saw his work on *TV Guide* and *Time* magazine covers—really notable places where you'd see the country's top illustrators."

Spohn eventually moved on from Atari as the company brought more and more of its illustration work in-house. With no shortage of clients, Spohn continued on for decades as a freelance illustrator for a variety of companies, including Delta, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, NFL, and many others. His current personal work delves more deeply into abstract expressionism. ■

# BASKETBALL

Released not long after Atari's Trak-Ball arcade version, the home version of *Basketball* is a joystick-driven, one-on-one affair, providing intense head-to-head court action. Atari would go on to create more elaborate sports titles, but *Basketball* was one of the first. The game also makes an amusing cameo in the film *Airplane*, as two air traffic controllers are found playing it rather than manning their equipment.

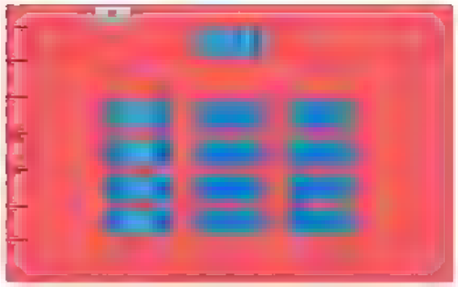

In this I was using the washes—'anti-painting.' You lay in a wash, then use a bristled brush to pull off some of the color, then spray fix it so you don't pull off all the paint. But in the end, it's all about the composition."

**CLIFF SPOHN**

▶ **Cover art for *Basketball* (2600)**
**Artist: Cliff Spohn**

# BRAIN GAMES

Another educational offering for the 2600, *Brain Games* utilized Atari's custom Keyboard Controllers to allow players a variety of matching and memory games. The Keyboard Controllers featured a numeric keypad with 10 digits and the * and # symbols, much like a conventional telephone. Interestingly, one of the variations within *Brain Games* is Touch Me, an updated version of Atari's *Simon*-like memory game which was released as both an arcade and handheld version before appearing in this game.



▼ **Cover art for *Brain Games* (2600)**
**Artist: Cliff Spohn**

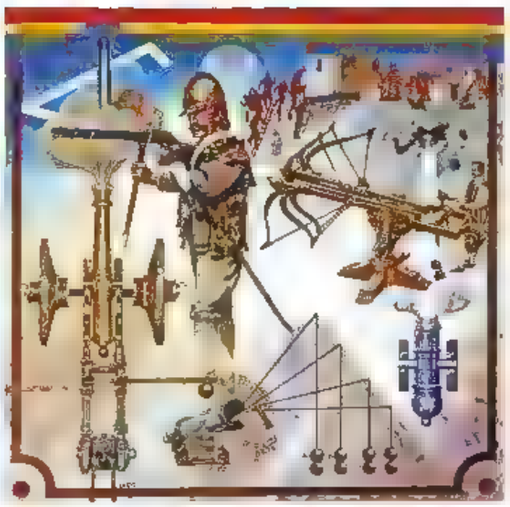
# BREAKOUT

A home version of the arcade hit for the VCS, the 2600 game pits the player against a rainbow-colored row of bricks, utilizing a bouncing ball to break through to the other side for a greater high score. With its addicting gameplay and iconic visuals, *Breakout* is one Atari's classic cartridges for the VCS.


For this I wanted to have some kind of motion to it, almost like handball or racquetball. I thought of different things—sledge hammers, guys breaking through walls. I just wanted to create a mood, so I drew these tennis players to show the movement back and forth."

**CLIFF SPOHN**

◂ **Game packaging for *Breakout* (2600)**
**Artist: Cliff Spohn**



▲ ***Breakaway* cover art for the Sears version of *Breakout***
**Artist: Rick Guidice**

▲ Unused concept for *Breakout* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

The concept was to take a Conan-like character (I used myself as the model) and give the old *Breakout* theme a different twist as the hero breaks through the 'wall' with a ball of fire at the end of a chain."

**STEVE HENDRICKS**


▲ Game packaging for *Casino* (2600)
Artist: Rick Guidice

I thought of Monte Carlo, outdoors, images of the car, and fun, attractive people having a good time. It always helps to sell it to the audience in that way."

**RICK GUIDICE**

## CASINO

A more elaborate version of Atari's earlier card-based games, *Casino* featured blackjack, poker and solitaire game variations. It includes versions for up to four players, using the paired Paddle Controllers. Best of all, there are no cards to shuffle or chips to count!

I real y wanted to have a whole mysterious, mil tary secretive thing—that cloak and dagger style, 1940s, mystery, codes and stuff. I was still us ng carry-through lines to move your eyes around the image, inside that foggy, mysterious kind of scene."

**CLIFF SPOHN**


▸ Game packaging for *Codebreaker* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

## CODEBREAKER

While the box artwork conjures a world of intrigue and espionage, the gameplay for *Codebreaker* is actu a ly much closer to the classic board game, *Mastermind*, deve oped by Mordecai Meirowitz, an Israe l postmaster and telecommunications engineer. In the Atari game, p ayers take turns trying to deduce a sequence of hidden numbers, entering them on numerica keys of Atari's Keyboard Controllers


◂ Game packaging for *Hunt & Score* (2600)
Artist: Susan Jaekel

This piece was done with Dr. Martin's dyes and black Prismacolor pencil."

**SUSAN JAEKEL**

## HUNT & SCORE

*Hunt & Score* is a memory matching puzzle game, as players try and match two "cards" that share the same shapes when overturned. Many of the actual game images are represented in Illustrator Susan Jaekel's art for the game packaging. Both Jaekel and artist Rick Guidice created artwork for the game—Guidice's art was used for the Sears branded version. The two artists were more than collaborators—they would later marry after their time at Atari.

▲ Artwork for the Sears game *Memory Match (2600)*, a renamed version of *Hunt & Score*
Artist: Rick Guidice

With *Memory Match*, I relied upon some of the images that were used in the game itself and expanded on others."

**RICK GUIDICE**

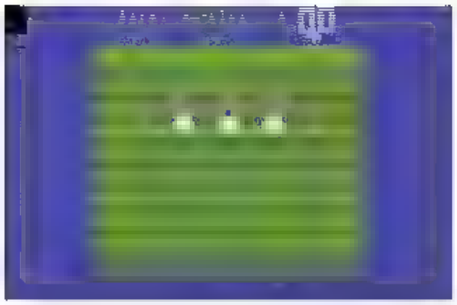
▲ Cover art for *Flag Capture* (2600)
Artist: John Enright

# FLAG CAPTURE

This gem is a two-person guessing game, as both players navigate their "explorers" in an attempt to locate the hidden flag within rows of squares. Clues are given to help players along, with added variations that include timed games and moving flags

# FOOTBALL

Due to the limits of the original Atari 2600 hardware, this version of *Football* is greatly simplified. Field goals are excised and plays are limited, but the game manages a three-on-three style of play that is still fun. And the clever use of an on-field "invisible line" marking the first down distance predates its use on television by twenty years!



I put the Atari logo on the bottom guy, and this guy tried to sue for likeness rights, but it wasn't him."

**CLIFF SPOHN**

▼ Cover art for *Football* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

# HOME RUN

*Home Run* was Atari's first attempt at a baseball game for the 2600, and it shows in the incredibly simple gameplay and graphics. Unable to include features like fly balls or independent fielders in this version, Atari would later vastly improve on *Home Run* with its *RealSports Baseball* game, showcasing how much programmers had learned to squeeze out of the 2600 console.

◀ Cover art for *Home Run* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

I did an initial design and was going to send it in, but I didn't like it, so I re-did it. It sucked. This composition is much better, and I never sent in the original one. I was always doing things like that—if I didn't like it, I'd re-paint it or re-do it."

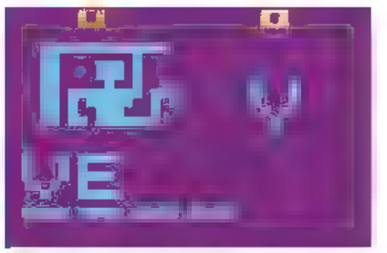
**CLIFF SPOHN**

▲ Unused cover art for *Home Run* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn


▲ Game packaging for *Hangman* (2600)
Artist: Susan Jaekel

"I had a lot of fun with this one, and I loved that balloon typeface that I used for the words."

**SUSAN JAEKEL**

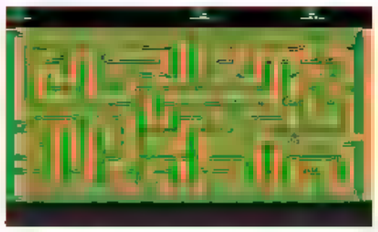


## HANGMAN

The Atari rendition of this classic pencil and paper game has added electronic variations, including skill levels that range from first grade through high school level words. Though words can't be longer than six letters, the game is still challenging, especially when timed.


▲ Game packaging for *Maze Craze* (2600)
Artist: James Kelly

▲ Alternate artwork for *Maze Craze* (2600)
Artist: Francis Livingston



## MAZE CRAZE

*Maze Craze* allows players to control one of two police officers—either red or blue—and to navigate them through a maze of city blocks. Along the way, players have to contend with armed robbers, blockades, and other challenges, in a race to exit the maze first, with a staggering 256 game variations


▲ Game packaging for *Night Driver* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

▲ Unused cover art for *Night Driver* (2600)
Artist: Rick Guidice

## NIGHT DRIVER

*Night Driver* was the first driving video game to use a "behind the wheel" perspective to convey the illusion of depth and speed. Based on Atari's black and white arcade version, this game utilized the Paddle Controllers to let players speed through the darkness, avoiding oncoming cars and navigating sharp turns.

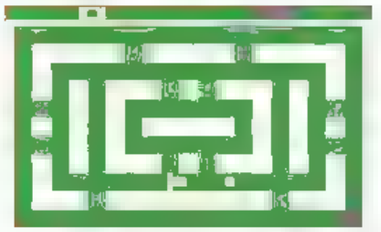
▲ Cover art for *Outlaw* (2600)
Artist: John Enright

# OUTLAW

Dueling gunfighters have been a staple of film and TV for years, and Atari brought its own entry into the mix with *Outlaw*, based on its earlier arcade game. One or two-player gunslinging action roars with obstacles like cacti, wagons, and barricades also complicating the standoffs at high noon.

▲ Game packaging for *Slot Racers* (2600)
Artist: John Enright

# SLOT RACERS

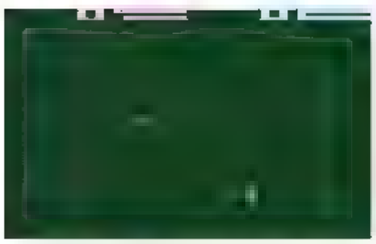


Playing like a cross between a shooting game and a maze runner, *Slot Racers* pits opponents against each other in simplified vehicles, whizzing through a labyrinth while dodging and firing

This was done at the same time I was doing the NASA work, and I took the opportunity to squeeze in as many planets and moons as I could, along with the fun of designing some spacecraft that were battling. This scene would be seen from inside a bubble dome control pod."

**RICK GUIDICE**


▶ Game packaging for *Space War* (2600)
Artist: Rick Guidice



## SPACE WAR

While one of the earliest entries for the 2600, this particular game has an even older pedigree. Atari's version of *Space War* is a direct conversion of what some consider the first video game, *Spacewar!*, created by Steve Russell, to be played on PDP-1 mainframe computers. *Spacewar!* was also Nolan Bushnell's inspiration for *Computer Space*, the first commercial arcade video game.

◂ Game packaging for *Superman* (2600)
Artist: Judy Richter

## SUPERMAN

Everyone knows the origin of Superman. The sole survivor of a doomed planet is rocketed to the safety of planet Earth, raised by adoptive parents, and uses his extraordinary powers to fight for truth, justice and the American way. Superman was also the property of DC Comics, another entity owned by Atari parent company Warner Communications. A year after the release of Warner's 1978 *Superman* feature film, this game version became the first film-licensed video game in history.


▲ Color production mockups of a game screen illustration for the *Superman* manual interior

DC gave you a playbook on exactly how to sculpt Superman. You would do some rough sketches. Cover art was the most crucial because that was going to be on the shelf. They [licensors] weren't as hands on in the actual game. They didn't have input or opinions on the game."

**JUDY RICHTER**

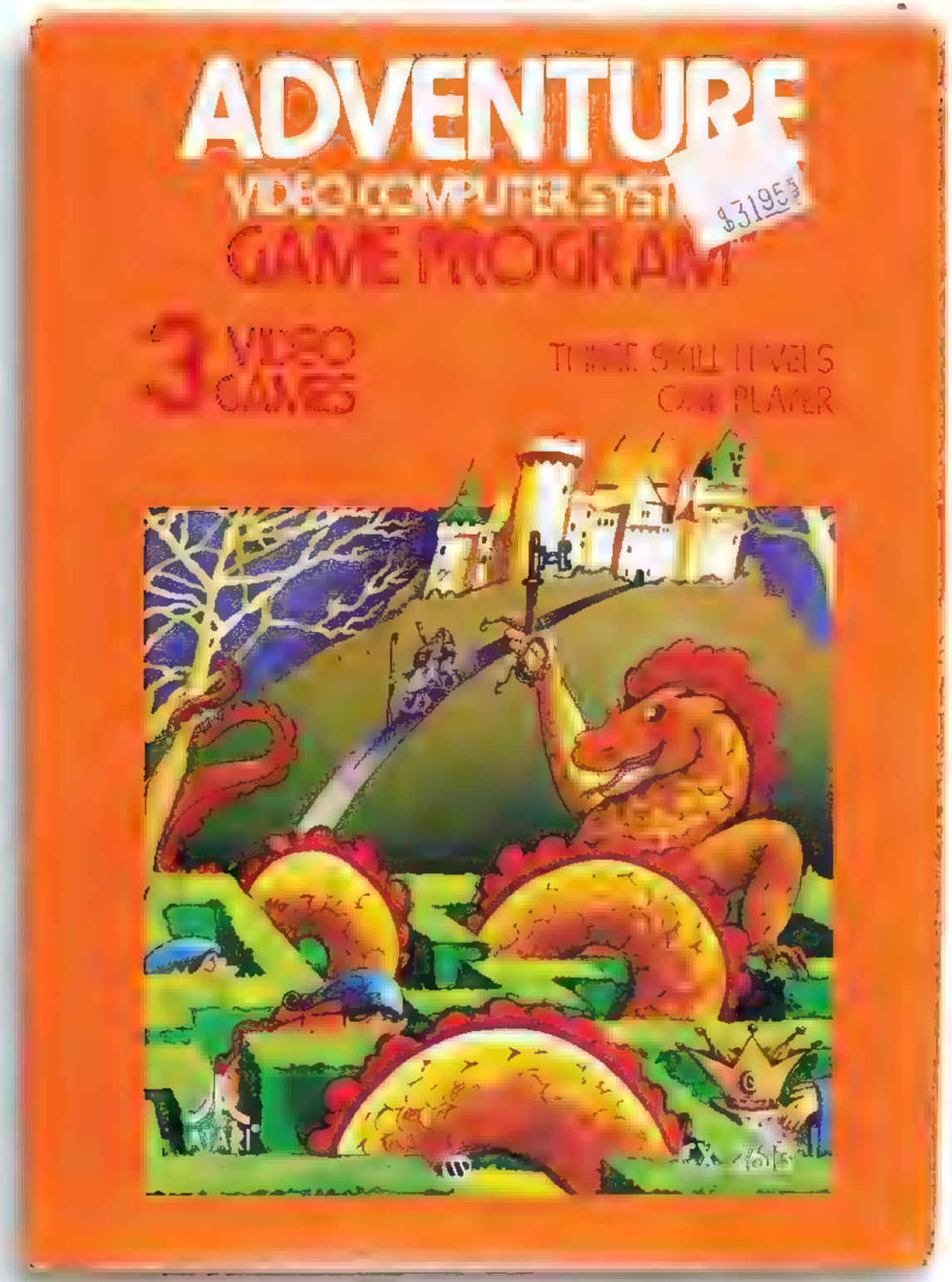

▲ Wonder Woman was another DC Comics character who never had the chance to share the Atari spotlight with Superman. This color study was created as part of a prototype pinball machine's backglass artwork.
Artist: Evelyn Seto

▼ Artwork used in a magazine ad for Atari's *Superman* pinball game
Artist: George Opperman

▲ Unused cover art for *Superman III* (400/800)
Artist: Terry Hoff

# SUPERMAN III

With the upcoming release of Warner's *Superman III* movie, Atari was also readying a game version for its 8-bit computers. Unfortunately, the film was a critical bomb, and the game was shelved after tepid response in consumer playtesting. But artist Terry Hoff still had the opportunity to create finished box artwork. "*Superman III* was something that they wanted to stay ahead of," he said, "so they had me working on the comp which you see on the box prototype. Then they approved it with some minor changes, as you can see. It's funny I didn't realize on the final version that the traffic was going the wrong way. We I, he was flying over a freeway in London, I guess!"

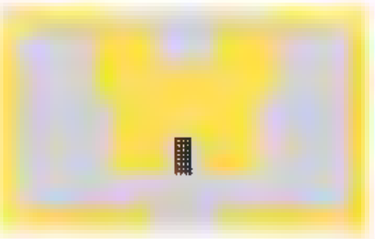



◀◀ Previous page: Detail of game packaging for *Adventure* (2600)
Artist: Susan Jaekel

This one seems to get the most fan mail. I loved doing that dragon! My dad gave me an airbrush, and I used that for the background hills and sky, along with pencil and ink lines too. What a lot of work!"

**SUSAN JAEKEL**

◀ Game packaging for *Adventure* (2600)
Artist: Susan Jaekel



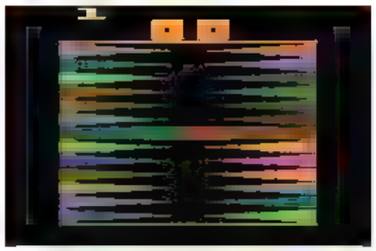
## ADVENTURE

This classic title broke ground as the first graphical adventure video game, serving as a template for many games to come. In *Adventure*, the player navigates a variety of mazes and catacombs—dodging bats, dragons and other perils in a quest for the Golden Chalice. Programmer Warren Robinett loosely based *Adventure* on the text-based *Colossal Cave Adventure* game, which he played at the Stanford A.I. Lab. *Adventure* is also famous for having one of the earliest video game "easter eggs," as Robinett hid his electronic signature credit in an obscure corner of the game, accessible only after collecting specific elements and bringing them together in a particular room.

▲ Cover art for *Backgammon* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

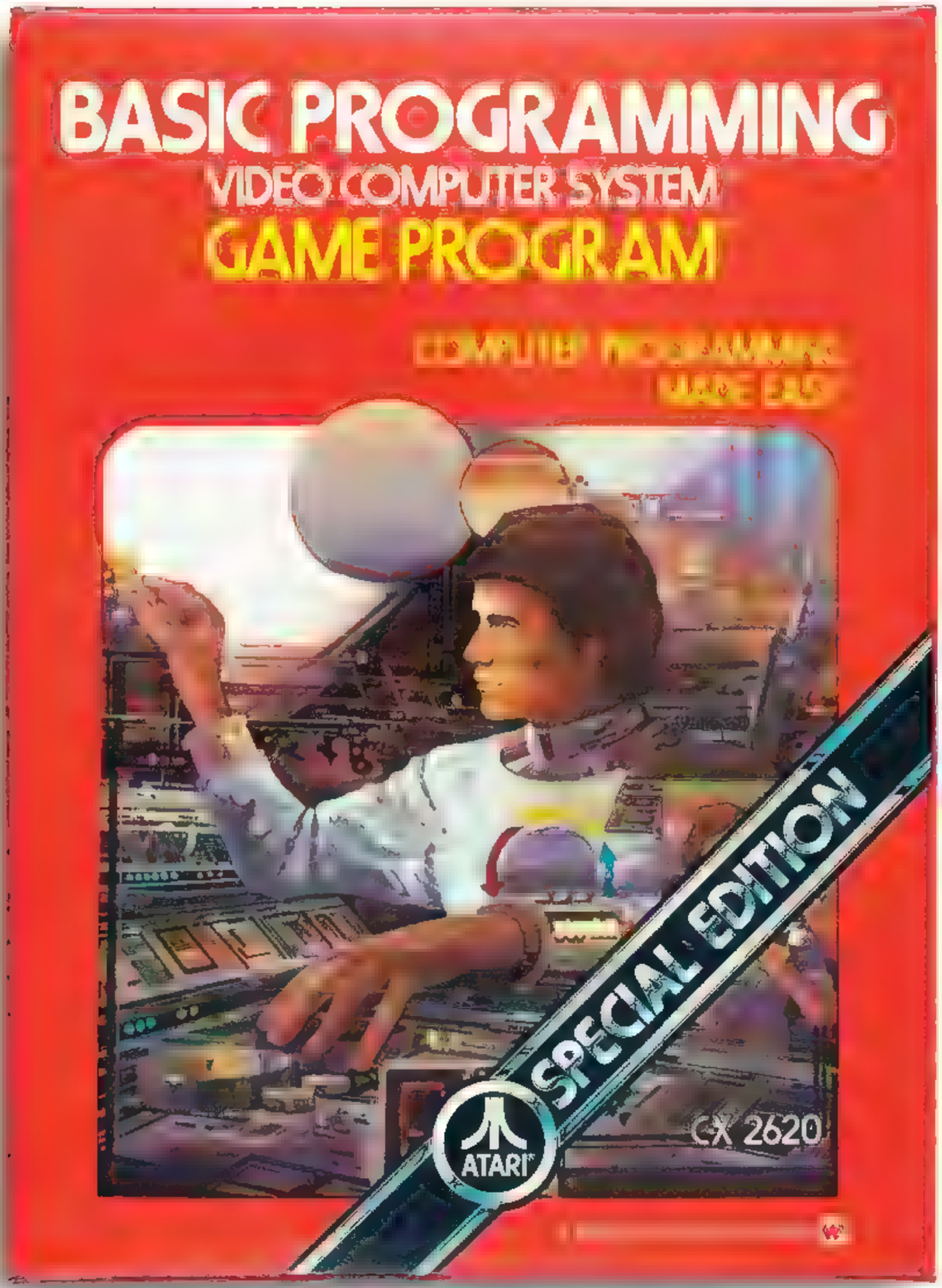
# BACKGAMMON

Based on one of the world's oldest known board games, Atari's *Backgammon* contains many of the elements of the ancient strategy game. Using the Paddle Controllers, players move pieces and roll dice either against another player or the game's AI opponent.

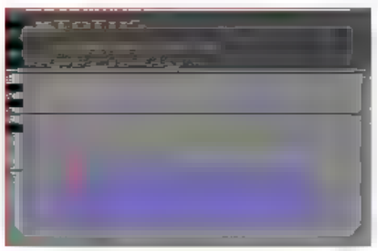


I was doing NASA work at the same time, and that was on robotics and the future control of drones ... and this ended up being similar."

**RICK GUIDICE**




◂ Game packaging for *Basic Programming* (2600)
Artist: Rick Guidice

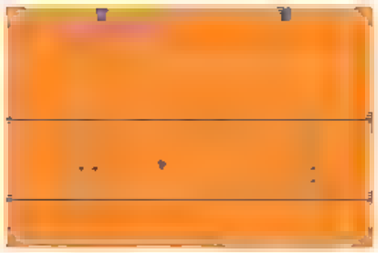


## BASIC PROGRAMMING

This game served as more of an introduction to computer programming than anything else. Given the capabilities of the 2600 and a limit of 63 characters for any program created, it is difficult to program anything substantial in the game. *Basic Programming* was very much an introductory educational tool, and utilized the numeric Keyboard Controllers.

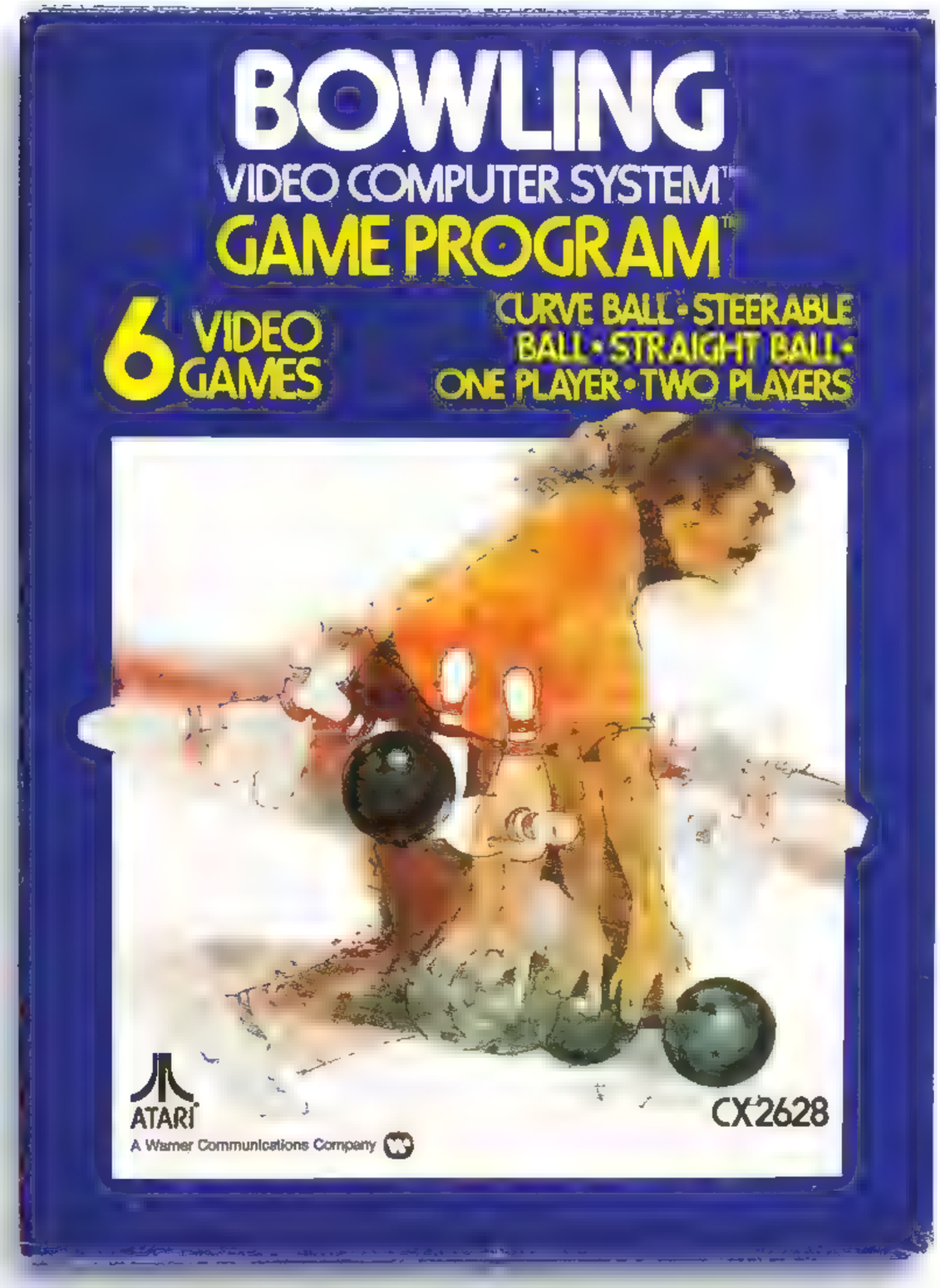
I wanted to push the design element – the staccato of the pins, the movement of the ball. I didn't overwork the pins, and wanted to keep it simple. And of course, the old mustaches."

**CLIFF SPOHN**



## BOWLING

Atari's *Bowling* sports a simplified presentation, but retains much of the charm of classic ten pin play. With several unique game variations, including a steerable ball option, the game still allows serious competition, whether it's tossing a gutter ball or hitting the pocket on the Brooklyn Side




▲ Game packaging for *Bowling* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

◂ Cover art for Sears *Canyon Bomber* (2600)
Artist: Rick Guidice

▾ Cover art for *Canyon Bomber* (2600)
Artist: Greg Vance

# CANYON BOMBER

Air-to-surface missiles are the weapon of choice in this game, as you drop explosive payloads into deep canyons or at enemy watercraft to be the first to 1000 points. Military strategy notwithstanding, this game shares visual cues with other early 2600 games like *Combat* and *Air-Sea Battle*

One of my favorites. I liked using the silhouette of a B-17 bomber with other B-17s and B-29s within the silhouette. I had the opportunity to use one of the historic bombing methods of hand dropping a bomb out of an open cockpit biplane. Off in the distance you can see a canyon in the horizon with flames, as if recently bombed. It pays homage to the name of the game."

**RICK GUIDICE**

I was going to have a guy rolled up into a ball—very graphic, moving, but it didn't work, so I went with the whole old time circus style. I don't remember how I derived it—maybe it was Evel Knievel or Captain America inspired, but the stripes gave it more movement, and I just wanted to follow the game's premise."

**CLIFF SPOHN**


▶ Game packaging for *Human Cannonball* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

## HUMAN CANNONBALL

Only the most madcap daredevil would agree to be shot from a cannon, but that's the premise of this 2600 game, as you adjust speed, angle, and power in order to safely launch your stuntman into a huge water tower. Otherwise, your thrill-seeker ends up flattened with a congratulatory "OUCH" animation to boot. This game is based on Atari's unreleased arcade game, *Cannonball*, by Owen Rubin

I went out to a local putt-putt course and shot pictures of everything around me, to get images for my files. I like creating that depth and realism, and bringing it up spatially and dimensionally."

**CLIFF SPOHN**


◂ Game packaging for *Miniature Golf* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

## MINIATURE GOLF

Stra ght from the land of putt putt, this game attempts to re-create the bizarre angles and banking shots needed to s nk your bal for a hole-in-one—or at least, not a bogey.

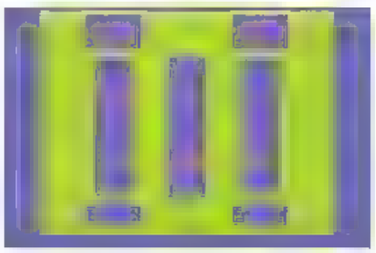
▲ Cover art for *Sky Diver* (2600)
Artist: Greg Vance

# SKY DIVER

Much safer than actually pulling a ripcord at 30,000 feet, *Sky Diver* allows players to drop from a plane, open the chute, and attempt to guide their freefalling sky diver onto the landing pad at the bottom of the screen. With moving platforms, wind changes, and head-to-head competition variations, the game keeps things light.

▼ Cover art for *Slot Machine* (2600)
Artist: John Enright

# SLOT MACHINE



While it might be a far cry from the clinking coins and exciting action of Las Vegas, this game lets players bet up to five coins before spinning the reels in the hopes of a jackpot. Either Lady Luck lends a hand, or you walk away with empty pockets

# VIDEO CHESS

For a classic cerebral game, Atari's *Video Chess* has quite the checkered past. The company had no intention of creating a chess game for the 2600 until a Florida man apparently sued Atari for false advertising. The original VCS box sported a chess piece illustration on the cover, leading some consumers to the conclusion that they could play chess on the console. After nearly two years, Atari's programmers were able to create a chess-playing algorithm with the help of national chess champion Julio Kaplan. With the technical hurdles overcome, *Video Chess* was released. The game also led Atari to invent the bank-switched ROM technology that allowed game cartridges to later increase in memory size.

▼ Cover art for *Video Chess* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

The question for me was, how am I going to get it to feel like you're *you* and playing against the computer? With all these lights and electronics, he could be you, or he could be the computer."

**CLIFF SPOHN**

# RICK GUIDICE

**RICK GUIDICE WAS** born and raised in San Jose, California, and began his love affair with illustration and architecture in his teens. "I started at 16, doing renderings in an architecture firm," he said. "This led to working in an advertising agency that did illustrations for residential tracts and architectural renderings. Then I got into architectural design beyond rendering."

On a scholarship, Guidice attended the Academy of Art College in San Francisco, and at 25 began freelancing, picking up both advertising and editorial work, while keeping one foot firmly planted in architectural illustration and design. But it was the development of Silicon Valley and its communication needs that drew Guidice into some of his most well-known work, for both Atari and NASA. "The high-tech wave came and Atari came along, and I did a series of illustrations for them," he explained. "I was working for Atari and NASA at the same time."

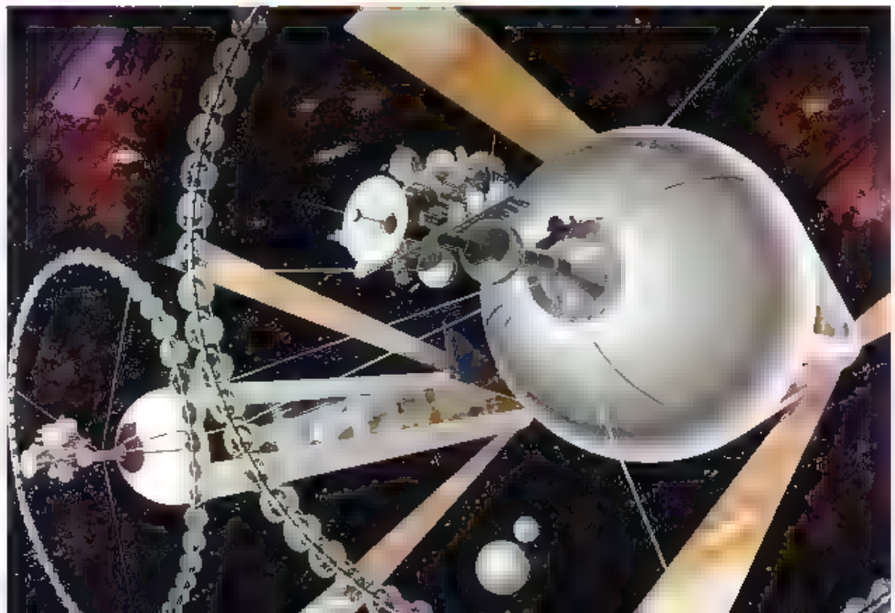
But Guidice's first blush with Atari still had an architectural component. "They called me to do an architectural design for the building entrance to make it look good," Guidice said. "I was an architectural designer at the time. It was one big, open warehouse with manufacturing, delivery, and shipping together—it was quite interesting." That project led to more freelance illustration with Atari, but this time in game packaging instead. "I would come up with preliminary sketches, and they would approve those and make comments. I was one of the first ones, before they hired art directors, about the same time as Cliff [Spohn]."

Similar to his visualizations for NASA, Guidice typically wasn't able to work from a subject he could see. "I never did see the [game] programs, since they didn't even have the games ready when we were commissioned," he recalled. "The art director would give us a verbal description of the game. When you're working as a full-time illustrator, you attack each problem in a systematic way. These were fun because you had the ability to come up with your own solution. The approach was to create and organize imagery related to the theme of the game, making the images fun for myself and creating excitement to promote the product."

At the same time Guidice was painting hot rods, biplanes, and blackjack dealers for Atari, his work caught the attention of NASA, and he was commissioned to create full-

BASIC PROGRAMMING ▪ BLACKJACK ▪ BREAKAWAY ▪ CANYON BOMBER ▪ CASINO ▪ MEMORY MATCH
NIGHT DRIVER ▪ SPACE WAR ▪ STREET RACER

## "WHEN YOU'RE WORKING AS A FULL-TIME ILLUSTRATOR, YOU ATTACK EACH PROBLEM IN A SYSTEMATIC WAY. THESE WERE FUN BECAUSE YOU HAD THE ABILITY TO COME UP WITH YOUR OWN SOLUTION."

▶ Guidice's renderings of a pair of O'Neill cylinders (bottom) and a cutaway view of the proposed Stanford Toroidal colonies that could house tens of thousands of permanent residents. Artist: Rick Guidice

color paintings depicting space missions and settlements for the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, California. This kicked off a 15-year working relationship where Guidice provided a hand-drawn, human face for NASA's exploration efforts. He explained: "The purpose of these pieces was to educate the public and to seek government funding and promotion for the programs. Whereas in the Atari covers, I had freedom to just have fun with whatever I chose to illustrate. NASA work, even though it was done in the same medium of acrylic, was to demonstrate a scientific image. The technical aspects and accuracy of the imagery were paramount to the scientists and engineers this work was done for." To help insure the faithfulness of Guidice's renderings, he attended meetings with NASA's mission directors and scientists to get a first-hand understanding of concepts discussed in the sessions. Each painting took him about three weeks to complete.

Much of that NASA work has been preserved, and now continues its life as part of traveling shows and exhibits. Some of them are also on display at the NASA Ames Research Center and The Smithsonian. Clearly a vintage view of tomorrow is still compelling to audiences of today. "I get calls from enthusiasts and futurists," Guidice said, "who are interested in how we saw things—a past look into the future."

Now, Guidice has his head out of the ionosphere, with feet planted on terra firma—quite literally. Since the mid-'80s Guidice has focused on architectural design projects, both residential and commercial, designing homes for many notable residents of Silicon Valley. ■

▲ Cover art for *3D Tic-Tac-Toe* (2600)
Artist: Susan Jaekel

# 3D TIC-TAC-TOE

In an attempt to update the classic game of Xs and Os, Atari brought this first graphical version of *Tic-Tac-Toe* into three dimensions with four stacked game levels. Though the 2600 can't achieve true dimensionality, the game cheats it with angled perspective, which actually makes it more difficult. In the end, no matter how it's dressed up, it's still *Tic-Tac-Toe*

I was off to the library for scrap [reference material] on the animals and clowns. I loved those brilliant colors, though they are light fugitive. I was using a frisket and air brush in the background. I was obviously using *Yellow Submarine* influences at the time."

**SUSAN JAEKEL**


▶ **Game packaging for *Circus Atari* (2600)**
**Artist: Susan Jaekel**

## CIRCUS ATARI

A fast-paced, whimsical game, *Circus Atari* gives the player control over a pair of seesawing acrobats whose goal is to pop rows and rows of colored balloons floating by. Considering Atari's bad experience with knockoffs of its own arcade games, it's surprising that this Paddle Controller game is clearly an unlicensed translation of Exidy's 1977 arcade game, *Circus*.

I used myself and a gal from our department as the models. I'm sure I found models for the cars."

**JAMES KELLY**

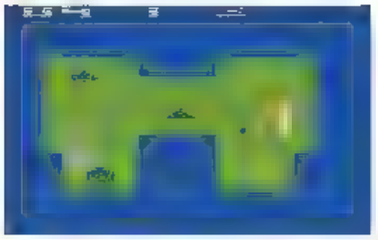

◂ Game packaging for *Dodge 'Em* (2600)
Artist: James Kelly

## DODGE 'EM

This maze-racing game begs players to drive their speeding vehicles through multiple, intersecting lanes, avoiding both the "crash cars," as well as the other player, while scoring as many points as possible in a short amount of time. Roaring engines and helmets are kindly suggested

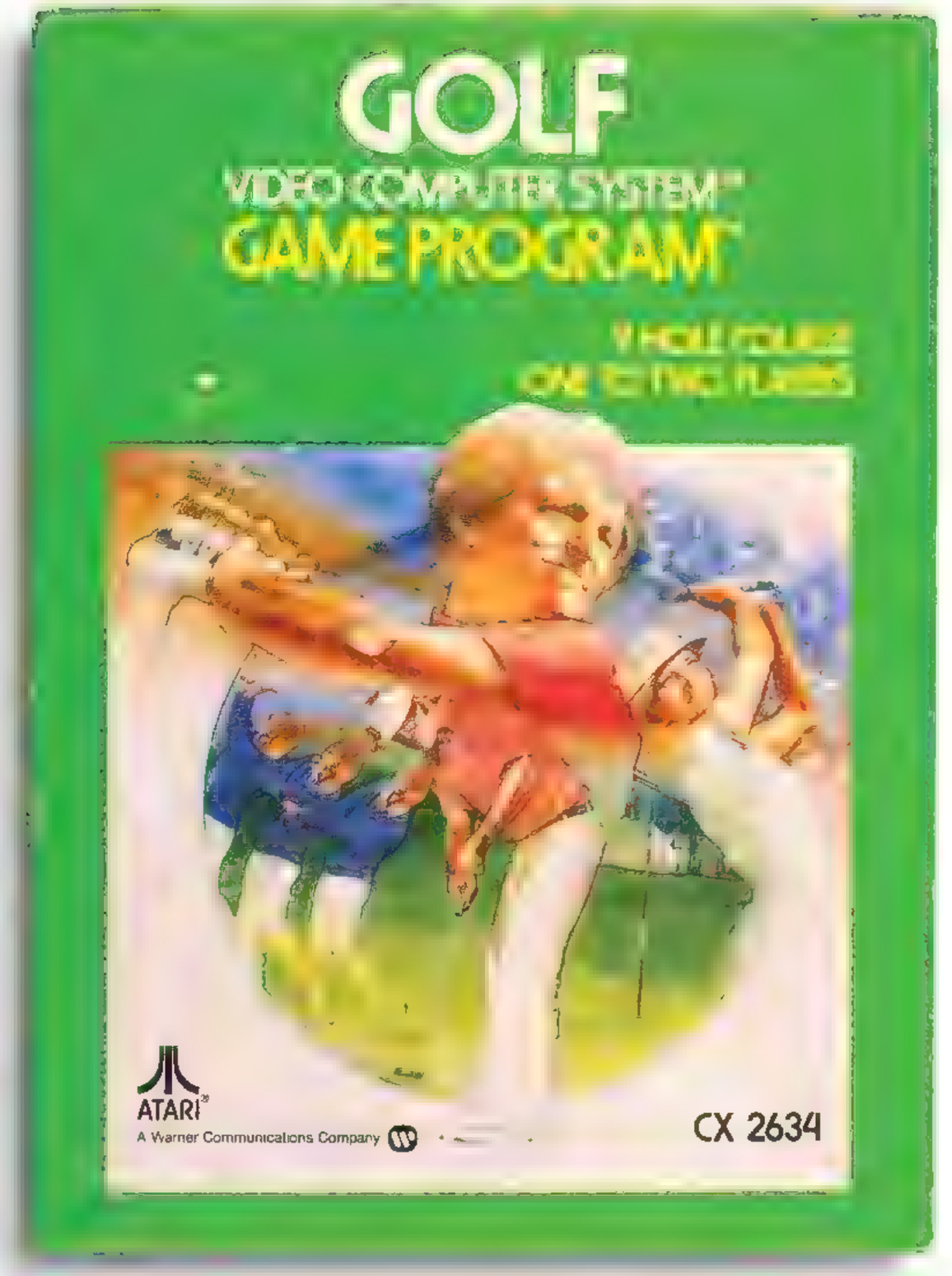
This was my first pa nt ng for Atar in 'the style ' ke most of my work at the time, this was done in acrylics and gouache."

**STEVE HENDRICKS**



## GOLF

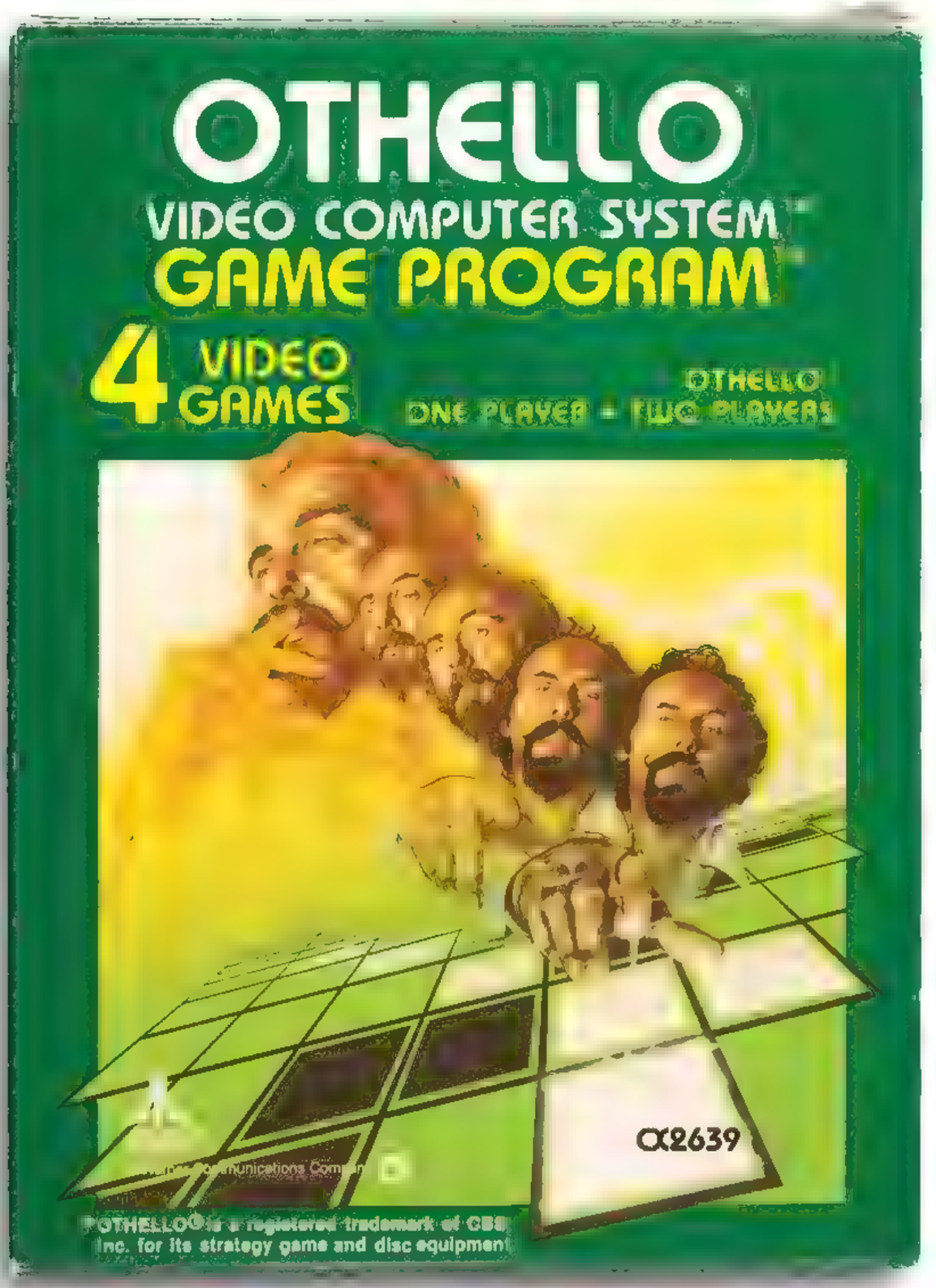
Beneath its simplified graphics and meager sound effects, *Golf* is a fun, nine-hole fairway experience. As the template for future golf video games—aim, swing, and connect—*Golf* doesn't try to do too much, but it still includes trees, water hazards, sand traps, the rough, and a zoomed-in display for putting. Not a bad day of hitting the links!



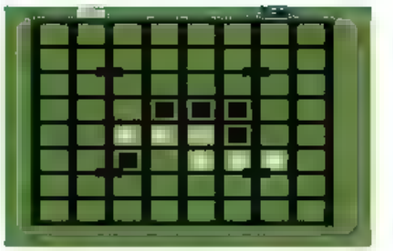

▲ Game packaging for *Golf* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

The main character in this piece was based on one of our amazing illustrators on staff at the time, Jim Kelly. I incorporated a little airbrush into this one, along with Prismacolor pencils and acrylics."

**STEVE HENDRICKS**




◂ **Game packaging for *Othello* (2600)**
**Artist: Steve Hendricks**

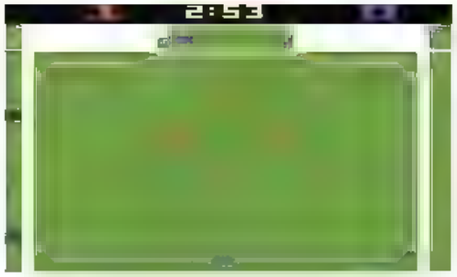


## OTHELLO

The original version of the board game *Othello*, called *Reversi* was invented in the 1880s. Played on a green grid of 64 squares with opposing black and white pieces, the game pits player versus player in a quest to control and capture as much of the board as possible to win. The Atari version is a perfect distillation of the game, providing enough challenge and quick competition to make it an unlikely winner in the Atari 2600 catalog

# PELÉ'S SOCCER

One of Atari's earlier sports games, *Pelé's Soccer* was "personally endorsed" by Brazilian footballer Pelé, widely regarded as the greatest soccer player of all time, and also named one of the "Top 20 Most Important People of the 20th Century" by *Time* magazine. The game itself is a top-down view of a green expanse of soccer field, vertically scrolling with three players on each side, and heavy passing action. A nice fireworks display is also shown after each goal. The game was first released as *Championship Soccer*




▲ Pelé at an event marketing his signature game for the Atari 2600

▲ Cover art for *Pelé's Soccer* (2600)
Artist: James Kelly

◄ Interior manual art for *Pelé's Soccer* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

▲ Cover art for *Space Invaders* (5200)
Artist: Bud Thor

# SPACE INVADERS

[illegible] release of the home version of *Space Invaders* that the 2600 truly took off. Sales [illegible] as [illegible]

Some small changes were made to accommodate the limits of the 2600's graphics, but the spirit of [illegible] for Invader veterans.

▲ Cover art for *Space Invaders* (2600)
Artist: Norman

▲ Unused cover art for *Steeplechase* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

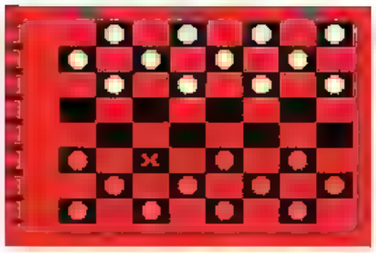
◀ Sketch concept for *Steeplechase* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

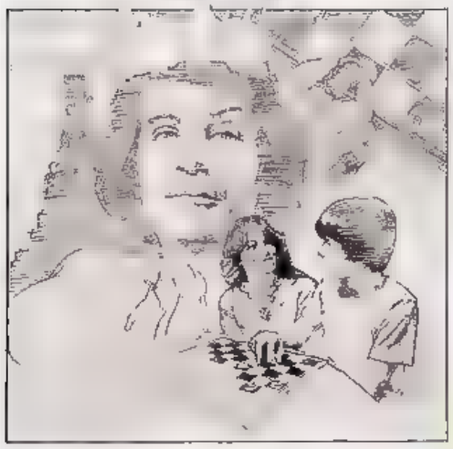

# STEEPLECHASE

This Sears-exclusive horse racing game allows up to four players (with Paddle Controllers) to gallop to victory by jumping hurdles and making it to the right side before the other jockeys. Atari downplayed the potential gambling aspect of horse races in this arcade game conversion, unlike the Mattel Intellivision *Horse Racing* game. Perhaps the equestrian action was more than enough for Sears.

# VIDEO CHECKERS

Like other ear y video game makers, Atari trans ated a handful of classic board games nto their on-screen counterparts, to provide some well-worn and familiar game experiences for those st ll adjusting to video game life And thus, checkers became *Video Checkers*. This version has an AI opponent and even ut l zes official green and buff tournament colors in the advanced levels. King me, indeed!





▲ Sketch concepts for *Video Checkers* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

▲ Cover art *Video Checkers* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

I used a brother and sister as my models for this one, and tried to get a little of that sibling rivalry into this piece."

**STEVE HENDRICKS**

▲ Cover art for *Video Pinball* (2600)

# VIDEO PINBALL


The 2600 version of *Video Pinball* shares some gameplay similarities with the earlier dedicated Video

"nudging" at the ball to gain additional bonus points, as long as the player doesn't tilt and lock up play. While true pinball wizards might scoff at the game, it remains a standout early game for the 2600.

▲ Cover art for *Demons to Diamonds* (2600)

# DEMONS TO DIAMONDS

Originally titled *Hot Rox*, this game's title was changed to the more descriptive *Demons to Diamonds*, a shooting gallery style two-player simultaneous affair. In the game, players participate in what the manual describes as a "Cosmic Carnival," shooting a variety of demons, transforming them into diamonds for a higher score

# SUSAN JAEKEL

**SUSAN JAEKEL WAS** born in Evanston, IL, to a pair of artist parents. "My dad was always bringing home manila paper for me to draw on," she said. "He taught me the alphabet at age four while drawing the objects that corresponded to letters. My mother had been an illustrator at David C. Cook in Elgin—that's where they met! My mom freelanced while my sister and I were little, till my dad got a job as an art director. However, they weren't thrilled that I had decided to make art my career. They felt teaching was a safer, more lucrative way to go, but I knew what I wanted. And I have been so lucky to be able to draw every day for a career."

Jaekel studied art at San Jose State University, and then was connected to Atari through her friend and fellow illustrator, Rick Guidice. Guidice was also working for Atari, NASA, and others. That friendship blossomed into much more, and the two formed a different sort of creative collaboration when they married in 1984.

"Artwork has always been a great selling tool," Jaekel said. "The '70s and '80s were a great time for illustration—art was everywhere, and it's different than now. But there will always be creative people making beautiful things. I worked in my own studio, freelancing, and worked in Los Gatos with a group of freelancers. I also worked in Sunnyvale. Los Gatos was a hotbed of artists—painters, sculptors, glass blowers. It was kind of secluded. In the '60s the freeway broke through, but it was isolated somewhat."

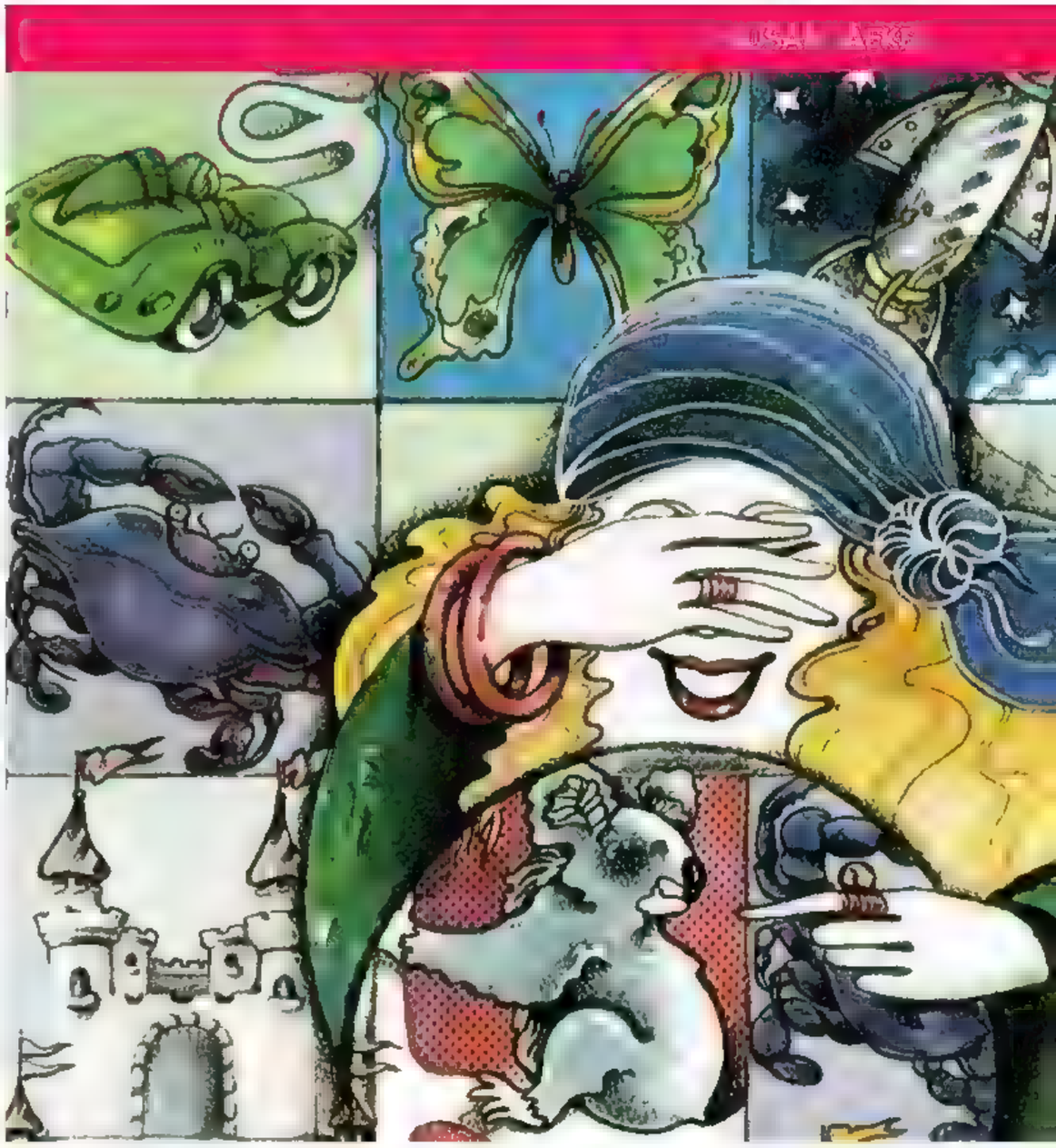
On working for Atari: "They gave us the assignments, but I never played any of the games beforehand. I came up with the initial concepts in pencil drawing and I'd bring it in for approval, then I'd paint the illustration. I used Dr. Martin's dyes on illustration board."

"At the time I was also working for *Sunset* magazine, book publishers, and graphic designers. The Bay area was good because of the rise of technology. The children's market was my favorite. I guess I was in touch with my inner child. That was my way."

"I do a lot of research beforehand, looking at other illustrators for inspiration. My creative approach was to thumb through the New York Illustrator's Annuals, my collection of children's books, or scrap file to get an idea—often sparked by an image that would get me thinking. Then I'd do several thumbnails and draw up a full-size pencil version that would be shown to the art director."

3D TIC-TAC-TOE ▪ A GAME OF CONCENTRATION ▪ ADVENTURE ▪ BASIC MATH ▪ CIRCUS ATARI
FUN WITH NUMBERS ▪ HANGMAN ▪ HUNT & SCORE

## "THE CLIMATE FOR WOMEN ILLUSTRATORS WAS GREAT. I THINK ILLUSTRATION IS A FIELD WHERE GENDER DOES NOT MATTER—IT'S JUST ABOUT THE TALENT AND THE ABILITY TO GET THE WORK DONE FOR THE DEADLINE!"



▶ **Detail image of Jaekel's art for *A Game of Concentration* (2600)**

While some might try to pigeonhole Jaekel's style, she is slower to put a name to it. "I like the 'imaginative' label," she said, "but I think 'stylized' or 'fantasy' would be more accurate than 'cartoony.' I shared my studio with a cartoonist for years. Maybe that did rub off! I did get more realistic as time went on, as did a lot of illustrators. The '70s were a great time for bright, loose styles, and then the trend went towards more realism."

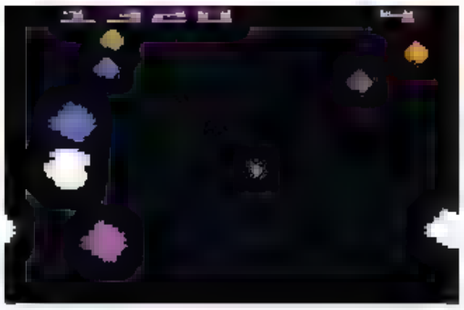
"The climate for women illustrators was great. I think illustration is a field where gender does not matter—it's just about the talent and the ability to get the work done for the deadline! I was just thinking of the women illustrators that I knew. One did beautiful botanicals and flowers for *Sunset* books and magazines. Another did very polished airbrush illustrations for video game packaging. Another did a lot of advertising work—and I eventually found my career niche with textbook illustration, along with some advertising, cookbooks, and magazine illustrations."

At Atari, Jaekel reported to art director Steve Hendricks. "Steve gave me freedom to do what I wanted," she mentioned, "and that kind of faith brings out the most creative stuff in you. He was an enthusiast for whatever we wanted to do." Hendricks described the appeal of Jaekel's style: "She is a very creative person. Her work was more imaginative, less photographic, and more cartoony. It lent itself nicely to the games she worked on."

While she was aware of Atari's soaring popularity, the cutting-edge video game technology didn't exactly connect with Jaekel. "I knew Atari was really big, but the games were like a foreign entity to me, and I resisted technology for a long time until I was forced to use it. It's the opposite of the way I think." Still, she looks back on her time working with Atari fondly. "It's fun to recall those great days. They were like a feather in my cap." ■

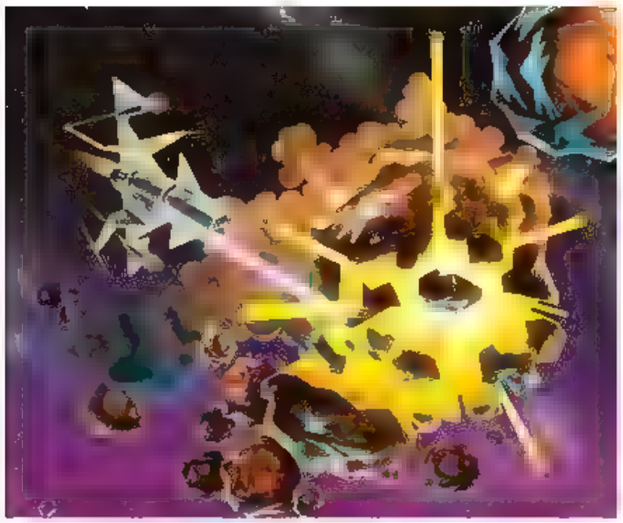
# ASTEROIDS

*Asteroids* was Atari's first big arcade hit, so it only seemed natural that a home console version would follow. While it was impossible for the 2600 to reproduce the vector graphics of the arcade game, this conversion stays true to the gameplay of the original. The same rock-blasting action of the original played out well on all subsequent Atari consoles, and was ripe for interpretation by each of the artists who depicted the game in illustrations. The 5200 version of the game was created but never released because of challenges in adapting to the system's analog joystick. A special button-based controller was also in the works to improve gameplay but was never finalized.



▲ Cover art for *Asteroids* (5200)
Artist: Terry Hoff

▲ Color study for *Asteroids* cover art (5200)
Artist: Terry Hoff



▲ Unused cover art for *Asteroids* (5200)
Artist: Bud Thon

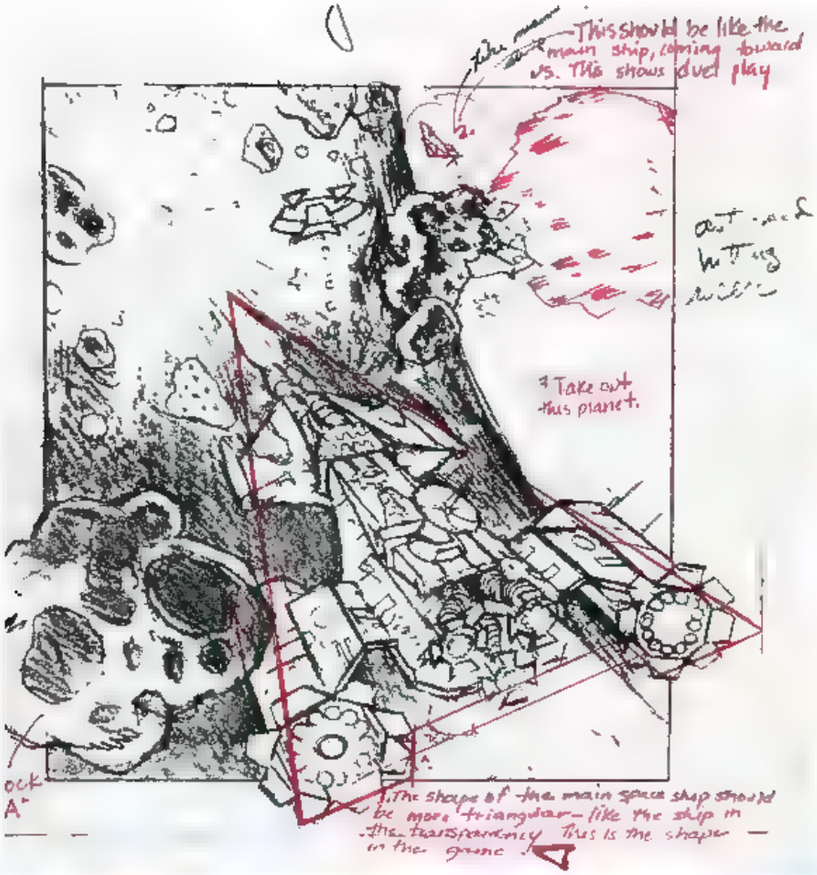
My idea was to view it from the first person perspective, and you could almost see a reflection of yourself in the cockpit canopy. The model was my friend, and I had the action going on around his head, almost like virtual space."

**TERRY HOFF**

▶ Cover art for *Asteroids* (2600)
Artist: Chris Kenyon

◂ Cover art for *Asteroids* (7800)
Artist: Greg Winters



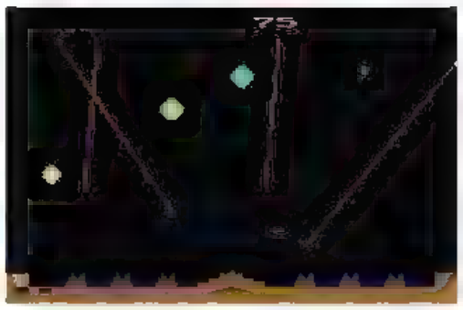



◂ ▾ Sketch concept with art direction notes and Polaroid color study for *Asteroids* (7800)
Artist: Greg Winters

▲ Promo art for *Asteroids Deluxe* (Arcade)
Artist: Marty Viljamaa

# MISSILE COMMAND

*Missile Command* is one of Atari's classic games, originally born out of very real Cold War fear and the looming threat of nuclear armageddon. The arcade version was originally conceived as much darker, titled *Armageddon*, with the player defending against a missile attack of California. The game name was changed and specific details omitted, but the overall cautionary messages remained. Arcade programmer Dave Theurer reportedly had nightmares of nuclear war after finishing his work on *Missile Command*, and the arcade version ends with a final bomb explosion and the words "THE END" appearing ominously. Despite these dark origins, the game's missile defense theme and addictive gameplay have proven it to be a classic of the genre.



▲ Interior manual art for *Missile Command* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks


◀◀ Previous page: Detail of cover art for *Missile Command* (Arcade, 2600)
Artist: George Opperman

▲ Flyer art for *Missile Command* (Arcade)

▲ Cover art for *Missile Command* (Arcade, 2600)
Artist: George Opperman

▲ Interior manual art for Missile Command (5200)
Artist: Chris Kenyon

▶ Cover art for *Missile Command* (5200)
Artist: Chris Kenyon

◀ Cover art for *Warlords* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

# WARLORDS

Developed by one of Atari's female programmers, Carla Meninsky, this innovative, four-player game places opponents in each corner of the screen, defending their castles (and kings) against the fireball attacks of others. Atari's copywriters created a Game of Thrones-esque backstory for the game, chronicling a blood feud between brothers born to royalty. The arcade version was actually based on Meninsky's VCS game, but delays allowed the arcade version to be released first

# STEVE HENDRICKS

**GROWING UP, STEVE** Hendricks wanted to be just like his dad, Joe, who was an illustrator. In his third grade class, the younger Hendricks told the other kids, "'I want to be a drawer!' Kids laughed," he said, "but I thought drawer was the perfect profession. Even though I didn't use the right word, they knew what I meant." His studies at California State University of Northridge in Industrial and Product Design ended early when he left school to take his first job at an industrial design studio in Canoga Park, CA. Moving to the Bay area in 1977, he found himself showing his portfolio around town.

After interviewing at a Los Gatos advertising agency, Hendricks got a call from someone at Atari—one of his other interviewers had recommended him for a staff position there. He explained: "They said, 'We're looking for illustrators, and you sound like a good fit.' I went in to interview with several folks, including George Opperman, and before I knew it, I was signed up to work at Atari. It was one of the most fun places I ever got to work."

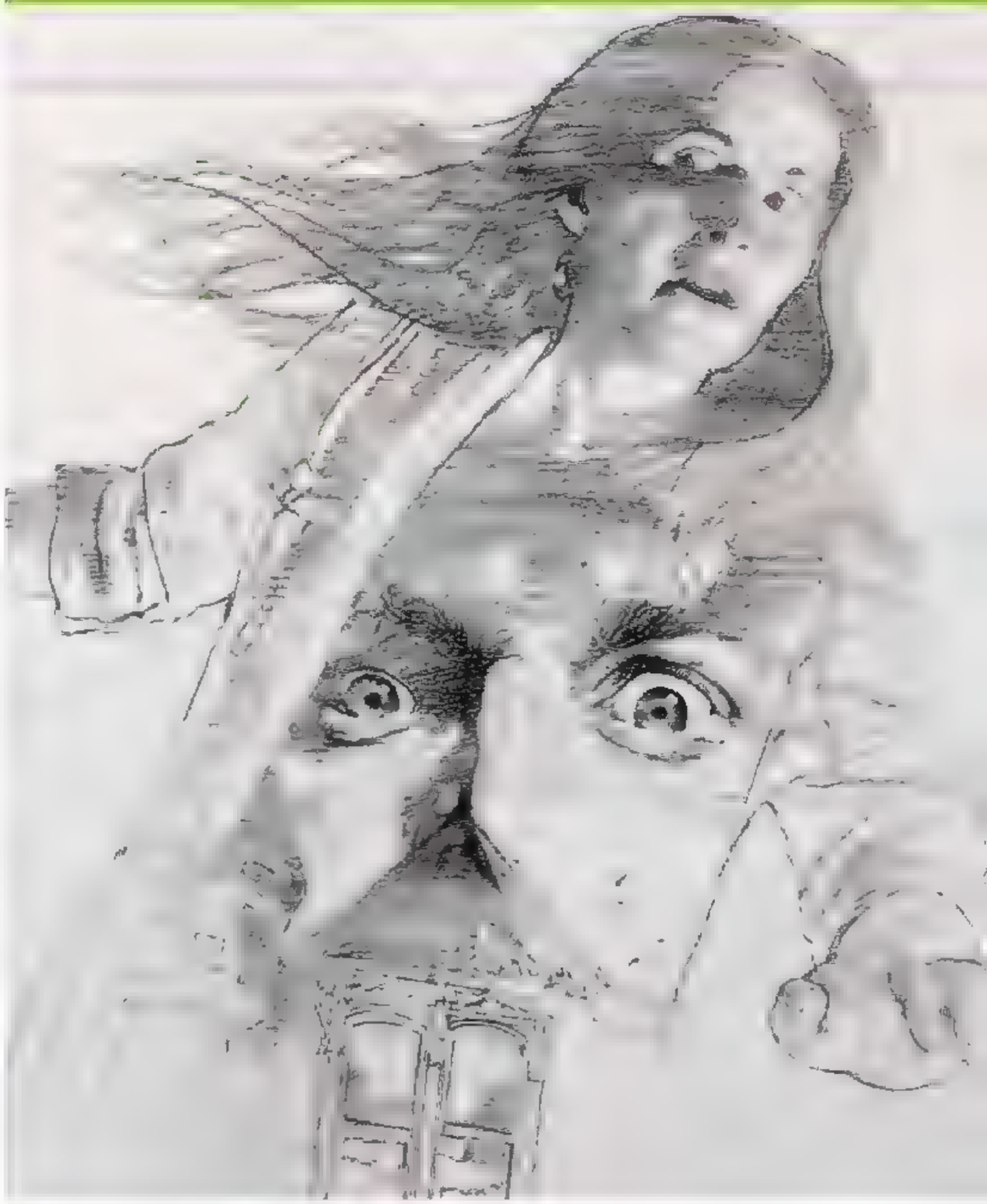
Hendricks began his tenure at Atari in the Coin-Op Division, working on game cabinet graphics—control panels, cabinet art, and the surrounding bevels. "We worked with our industrial design team right there who designed the cabinets and controllers. Their designs would be captured by the mechanical engineers to build the stuff, and we would use line art from them to do the concepts, with tracing paper, sketches and Prismacolor pencils. I used a lot of the industrial design techniques from college in designing the art."

"Production artists like Jim Arita would blow up our art on acetate and trace over our concepts, doing the line work. Sometimes we would do it ourselves. It was all silkscreened—sometimes 14 colors on one! It was all solids and you had to think about the bleeds and registration. It was a fun process."

"The games were simple so you had to create as much of the context with reality as you could," he explained. "We had to implant the visual image in the gamer's mind. We would work with programmers who came up with the game concepts—they were super creative."

BREAKOUT ▪ DEFENDER ▪ GOLF ▪ HAUNTED HOUSE ▪ MISSILE COMMAND ▪ NIGHT DRIVER ▪ OTHELLO
POLE POSITION ▪ REALSPORTS SOCCER ▪ STEEPLECHASE ▪ VIDEO CHECKERS ▪ WARLORDS

## "WE TRIED TO TAKE THE IMAGINATION OF THE GAME DESIGNERS AND KEEP IT CONCEPTUAL—LOOSE, REPRESENTATIONAL, CAPTURING A LOT OF THE ASPECTS OF THE GAME IN ONE ILLUSTRATION."



▸ Sketch concept for *Haunted House* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

◂ Sports montage photo of Steve Hendricks for 4-Player *Football* ad (Arcade) in *Replay* Magazine, August 1979

Hendricks later was "stolen" by John Hayashi for the Consumer Division, and along with James Kelly, Hendricks later supervised the illustration team.

"On the 2600 packaging they told us to 'do something that could spark the imagination of young buyers,' and we tried to give them some flesh and blood and energy. We tried to take the imagination of the game designers and keep it conceptual—loose, representational, capturing a lot of the aspects of the game in one illustration. I used to use markers on a frosted acetate sheet of Delrin® and the rubber cement thinner Bestine. The technique was to drip Bestine on design markers to get it to run so it looked like watercolors. I used an oil based pencil so I could draw on the Delrin."

"The art did help kids visualize what the game was about," he continued. "They also hired creative writers to invent stories for the manual, all in line with the creator's vision—just enough to get you hooked on the game's story. The way we approached our packaging was like a paperback book—it made it richer, imaginative, and playful."

Hendricks left Atari in 1982 to pursue independent illustration work, with representatives in New York and Los Angeles. He later worked at the interactive toy company Worlds of Wonder (creators of Teddy Ruxpin and Laser Tag) founded by former Atari employees. Hendricks also lent his creative talents to Sun Microsystems and Sega, another well known video game company. He currently works as a Creative Director at a Santa Clara design agency, FineLine Graphics & Design. ■

▲ Interior manual art for *Berzerk* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

▶ Cover art for *Berzerk* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

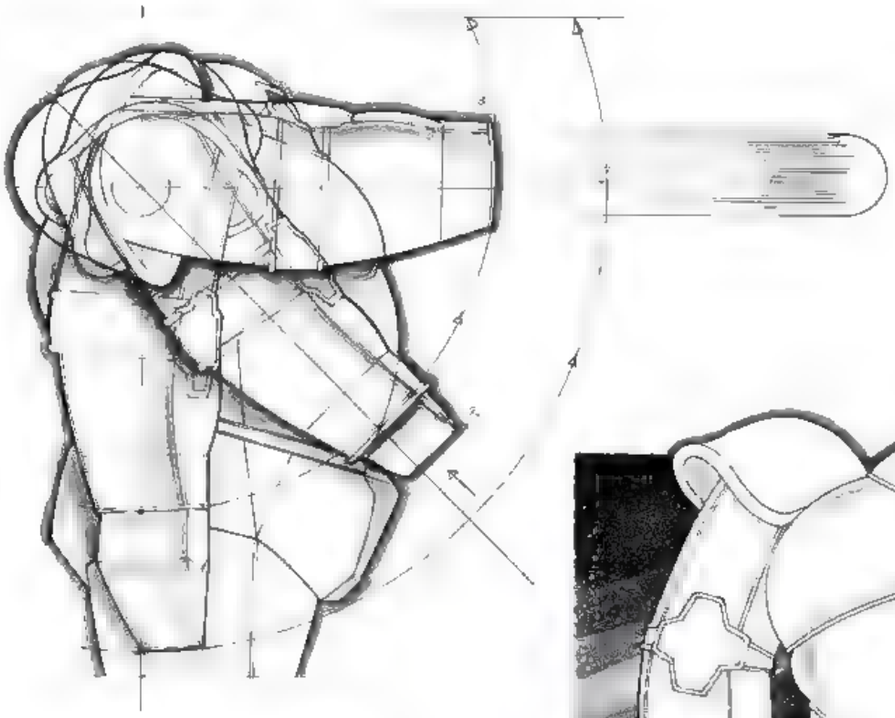
# BERZERK

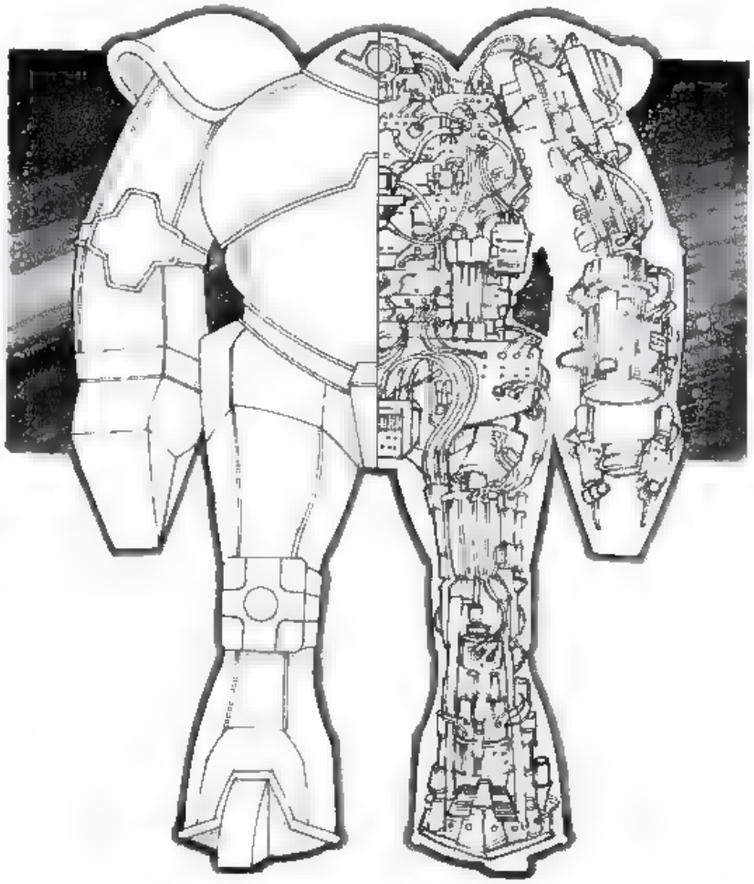
Based on the hit arcade game by Stern Electronics, the 2600 capably reproduces most of the coin-op experience in this version. Like in the original, the player roams endless mazes, blasting killer robots while trying to avoid the frightening-yet-cheery villain, Evil Otto. A challenging game as the difficulty ramps up, the 2600 unfortunately wasn't able to reproduce the digitally-synthesized speech of the arcade: "Chicken! Fight like a robot!"

▶ Cover art for *Berzerk* (5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

I also did a few black and white diagrams of the robot. It was my feeble homage to my childhood hero, Mr. Osamu Tezuka's diagrams of his world-famous creation, Astro Boy."

**HIRO KIMURA**

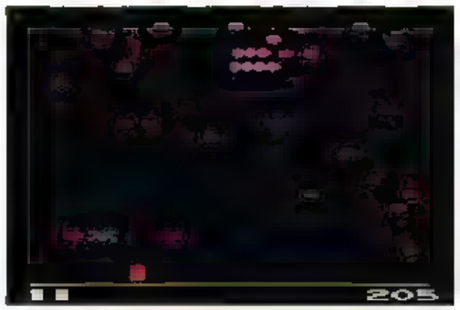




▲ ▶ Interior manual art for *Berzerk* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura


▲ Black and white logo artwork for *Berzerk* (5200)

▲ Cover art for *Centipede* (2600)
Artist: Burrell Dickey




# CENTIPEDE

The original version of *Centipede* was noteworthy for being the first arcade game designed by a woman, and Atari took full advantage of that PR surrounding the popular game. Programmer Dona Bailey actually co-created the game with colleague Ed Logg, and the 2600 version faithfully recreates the frenetic gameplay of the original, if not its slick graphics. Atari produced even more accurate versions of the game on its other early consoles, ensuring that no multi-legged arthropods are safe

▼ Dealer catalog logo for *Centipede* (2600)



◀ Dealer mobile for *Centipede*
Artist: J. Hargreaves

▶ Interior manual art for *Centipede* (5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura


▲ Cover art for Centipede (400/800)
Artist: Rebecca Archey

I viewed the game as a Hobbit-like setting with a gnome as the hero, shooting sparks from his magic wand at the centipede and spider. I proposed the idea and it was approved. The only change requested by management after the painting was finished was to eliminate the sparks shooting from the wand, as they deemed it too violent. If you ever wondered what's happening in the artwork, why the centipede is splitting, now you know the reason why."

**HIRO KIMURA**


▲ Cover art for *Centipede* (5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

# COMBAT TWO

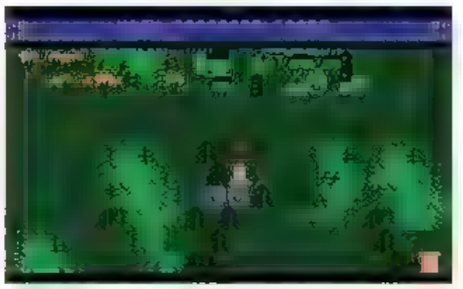
The proposed sequel to Atari's first (and one of its most popular) 2600 games, *Combat Two* would have upped the ante from the original tank battle game. With added landscape elements such as water, forests, rivers and bridges, as well as a built-in level editor, the game seems to have grown in scope from the original. While officially announced, *Combat Two* was later canceled and mostly forgotten, until an unfinished prototype surfaced in 1999, provided by former *AtariAge* magazine editor Steve Morgenstern. The game was later released as part of the Atari Flashback 2 console.

▲ Cover art for unreleased *Combat Two* (2600)
Artist: Michel Allaire

▶ Interior manual art for unreleased *Combat Two* (2600)
Artist: Warren Chang

▲ Cover art for *Countermeasure* (5200)
Artist: Terry Hoff

▶ Detail of cover art for *Countermeasure*
Artist: Terry Hoff



# COUNTERMEASURE

This title was exclusive to the 5200 ProSystem, next in the grand tradition of war-themed games like the popular *Combat* for the 2600. The player controls a high-powered tank, determined to prevent enemies from launching a nuclear warhead and destroying the world, in classic Cold War style.

# DEFENDER

The arcade version of *Defender* by Williams Electronics was heralded as an instant classic when released, because of its unique premise, fast-moving gameplay and difficulty. While its translation to the 2600 required some compromises in both graphics and gameplay, it retained the spirit of the original. The 5200 and computer versions were more faithful, and Atari remedied the shortcomings of the 2600 version with the later sequel, *Defender II*, also released as *Stargate*.

▶ **Sketch concept for *Defender* (2600)**
**Artist: Steve Hendricks**

"I had two of the gals who worked in the records archive department (where they kept the mechanicals and files) model. That ship was a cannibalized version of things borrowed from *Star Wars* and the *USS Enterprise*. I cut them up, lit them, and photographed them."

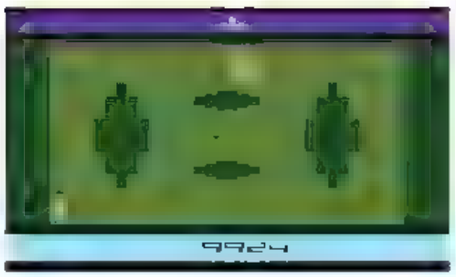
**STEVE HENDRICKS**

▶ **Cover art for *Defender* (2600)**
**Artist: Steve Hendricks**

▲ Wrinkled Cover art for *Defender* (2000)
Artist: Chris Sawyer

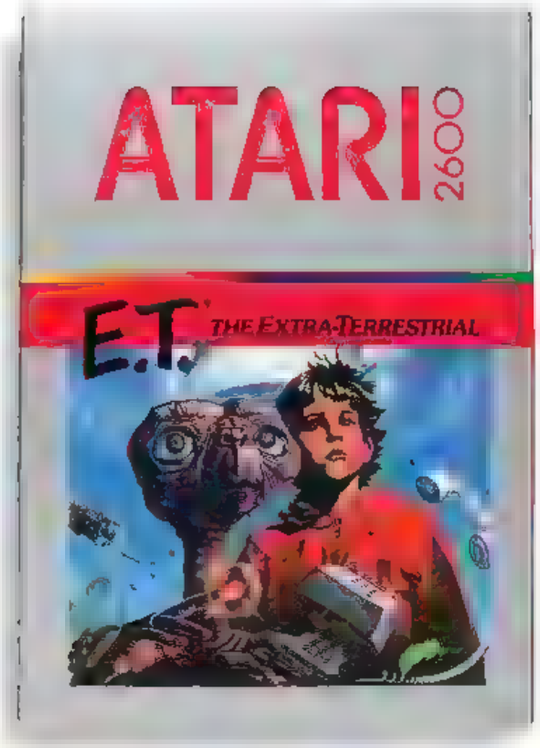
← Cover art for *Defender* (1,700)
Artist: Robert Hunt

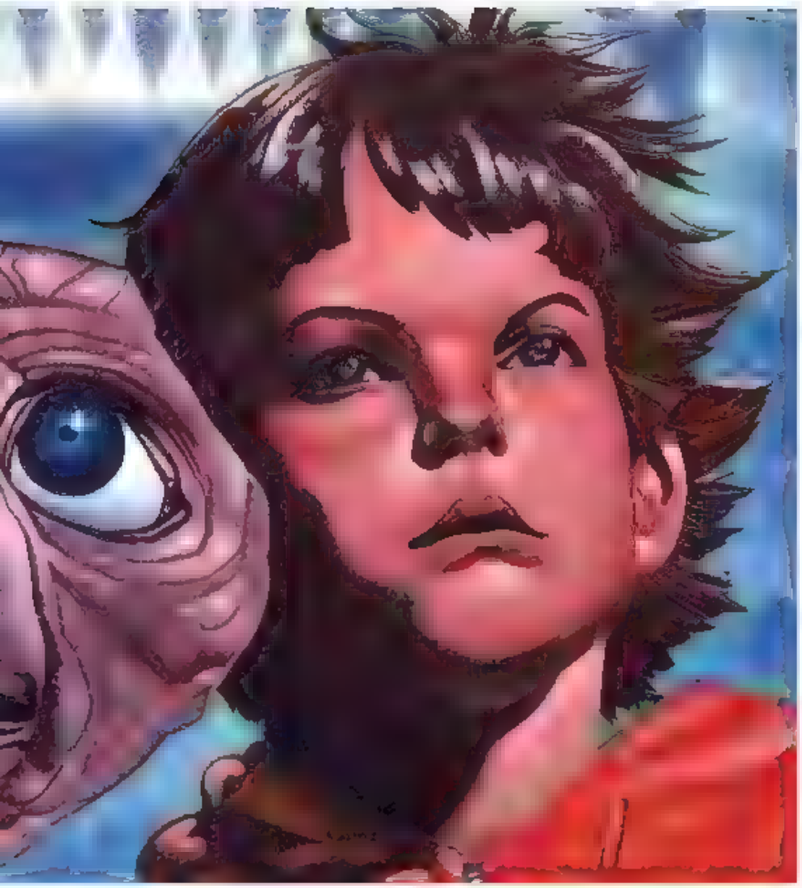
# E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL



The legend that has grown up around Atari's licensed *E.T.* title nearly eclipses the actual game itself, which is a shame. Underneath landfill burials and labels of "worst video game ever" is an imaginative adventure title that pushed the boundaries of the 2600. Programmed by Howard Scott Warshaw in a ridiculously-short six weeks, the game sends E.T. searching for three parts of his communications device needed to "phone home." While attempting to rendezvous with his spaceship, E.T. can gather candy pieces (Reese's Pieces), get help from Elliott, and avoid both a menacing FBI agent and a meddlesome scientist. The game does have collision detection issues getting in and out of pits, and the instruction manual is required reading, but in all, *E.T.* is an enjoyable game and welcome part of the 2600 library.

▲ Cover art for *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura



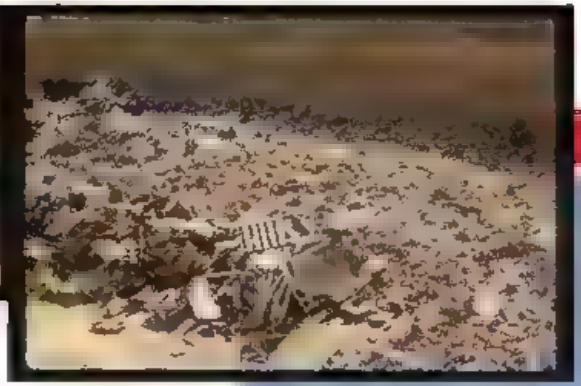
▲ Detail of unused cover art for *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (2600)
This view highlights Kimura's original artwork before feedback given to the artist to depict Elliott as more "worried."
Artist: Hiro Kimura

The very first time I saw *E.T.* was through Atari. The company rented a movie theater for a private showing of the movie to all Atari employees. Several days later, I was asked to work on the video game package illustration of the film. I recall a much shorter deadline than usual, a little less than two weeks, as the game was intended Christmas that year, just a few months away.

The most difficult part of the project was that there were hardly any reference photos of the movie, particularly of E.T. itself and Elliott, since the film was just released. All the movie studio provided were a few 35mm slides. Out of desperation, my wife and I went to a nearby theater showing the movie and I took photos of the screen while my wife looked out for anyone suspecting our activity.

With a little more reference material, I went through the usual steps starting with initial sketches, but this time on steroids. I finished it on time, and on that day I brought it into Atari, as luck had it, Mr. Spielberg visited Atari to see the game's progress. I was introduced to him, showed him the artwork and he requested two minor changes. They were to 1) make Elliott look worried rather than defiant and 2) emphasize the glow around E.T.'s fingertip. I had to make the changes overnight and the final result is what's on the package."

**HIRO KIMURA**



Original burial of Atari cartridges in Alamogordo landfill, 1983

# E.T. UNEARTHING A MYSTERY

**IT'S ONE OF** [illegible]

**MYTH** [illegible]

[illegible]

**QUESTION 1: Buried?**

[illegible]

**QUESTION 2: Was E.T. a financial success?**

[illegible]




Alamogordo Daily N

Tons of Atari games buried

Dump here utilized

Documentary director Zak Penn displays an E.T. cartridge during excavation of the dump site


◀ ▲ Archaeologists remove and inspect items found during excavation of the Alamogordo landfill site

## YES, ATARI BURIED UNSOLD, DAMAGED AND UNWANTED MERCHANDISE UNDERNEATH A LAYER OF CEMENT IN THE HOT SUN OF ALAMOGORDO.

The fee was exorbitant—nearly ten times the going rate for game licensing, but not necessarily a deal-breaker for a video game based on a film by one of the era's most acclaimed directors. It still sold an estimated 1.5 million cartridges,[19] making it one of the system's better performing games, even though nearly four million games were manufactured. Though it was probably a bad decision that hurt Atari both reputation-wise and financially, it was by no means a company-killer.

**QUESTION 3: Was E.T. really the "Worst Game Ever?"** Absolutely not. Programmer Howard Scott Warshaw did an admirable job creating this game, but in the end, he was most likely set up to fail. Warshaw was one of Atari's star programmers, creating the original Atari game *Yars' Revenge*, and was no stranger to movie games, having designed the movie-licensed version for another Spielberg property, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. However, time was against him in this particular scenario. In a classic move of putting the cart before the horse, Spielberg's demand of a Christmas launch gave Warshaw only five weeks to complete the game. If the deadline passed, the licensing fee would have been wasted, the sales window slamming shut. He had five weeks to design, develop, and test the *E.T.* game, whereas a typical game creation cycle would be five or six months. With those constraints built in from the outset, Warshaw managed to put together an engaging and groundbreaking adventure game.

Was *E.T.* a perfect game? By no means. The game has notorious collision detection issues with the player's E.T. character falling into and getting out of pits. Frustration seems almost baked into the gameplay experience, with supporting game characters suddenly appearing to thwart E.T.'s efforts (the game player's) in annoying fashion. The specific game mechanics are somewhat complex, and require reading the manual closely, which was unusual for Atari's game stable, and might have been a problem given the age of E.T.'s target market. But Warshaw's *E.T.* was part of an immersive and complex world not yet seen on the 2600 platform. It allowed for multiple ways to solve the game challenges and "send E.T. home," and it sported an ending that echoed the film's tear-jerking finale. But Atari had already released games of even more dubious quality, delivered on much longer timelines. *E.T.* could have surely benefited from further testing and refinement, but Warshaw's only crime might be that of pride—believing he could create an innovative, fully-formed game within that ridiculous timeline.

# E.T.™ NEEDS YOUR HELP!

[illegible] three million light years from home [illegible] friends will come back and res[illegible] E.T. [illegible] phone home. But he can't do it alone! E.T. needs help from his human friend — and that's you, in Atari's exciting new E.T. video game cartridge!

E.T. and you have plenty of problems to overcome before he can rejoin his fellow extra-terrestrials. There are the government men chasing him, and the scientists who'll do heaven knows what if they catch him! [illegible] quick reflexes and sharp strategy, though, and E.T. [illegible] the way home — until the next game, that is! [illegible] arrives in December. — Order Today and Save!

[illegible]em Code C61 [illegible] Regular Price $39.95
Club Member Price just $35.95

Call Toll-Free
1-800-345-8600
(Pa Residents call 1-800-662-5180)
or use the convenient
Mail Order Form

▸ *AtariAge* magazine ad announcing the availability of *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*

**QUESTION 4:: Did E.T. bring down the video game industry?**
No. Atari and others did that themselves. The licensing deal that brought *E.T.* to Atari didn't help the company's financial performance, but the wheels were already in motion for Atari's stumbles. Atari's decline was already happening before *E.T.* was developed. In early 1983, analysts has already suggested that the consumer video game market was a bubble ready to pop, with the industry suddenly finding itself awash in new products and games, all competing for the same dollars and shelf space.[20] That, coupled with some of Atari's questionable sales return and financial reporting practices, set the company up for a serious fall, from which it never really recovered. *E.T.* just had the bad fortune of being released at precisely that moment. ■

▲ Cover art for *Haunted House* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

# HAUNTED HOUSE

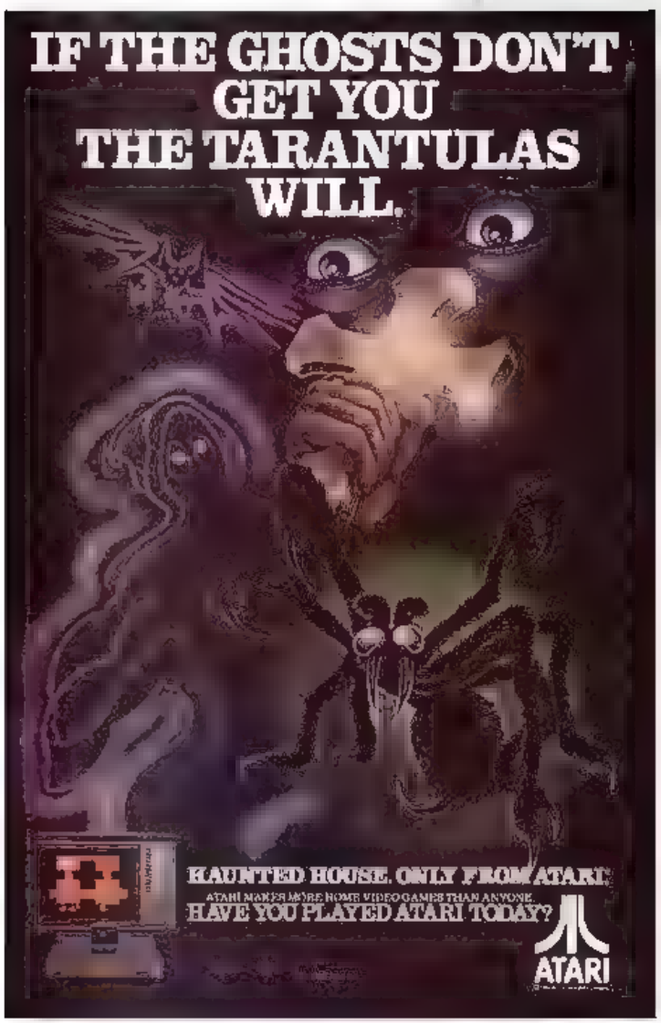
A moody, atmospheric game for the 2600, *Haunted House* (also originally to be called *Mystery Mansion* and *Graves Manor*) drops your character into the abandoned Graves Mansion, searching for all three pieces of a mysterious urn and a way to escape unscathed. With only a flickering match to guide the way at some points, a series of bats, tarantulas and the spirit of Graves himself try and take each one of your nine lives. The game is a clever and popular maze adventure game, and has earned its reputation as one of the best original games for the 2600.

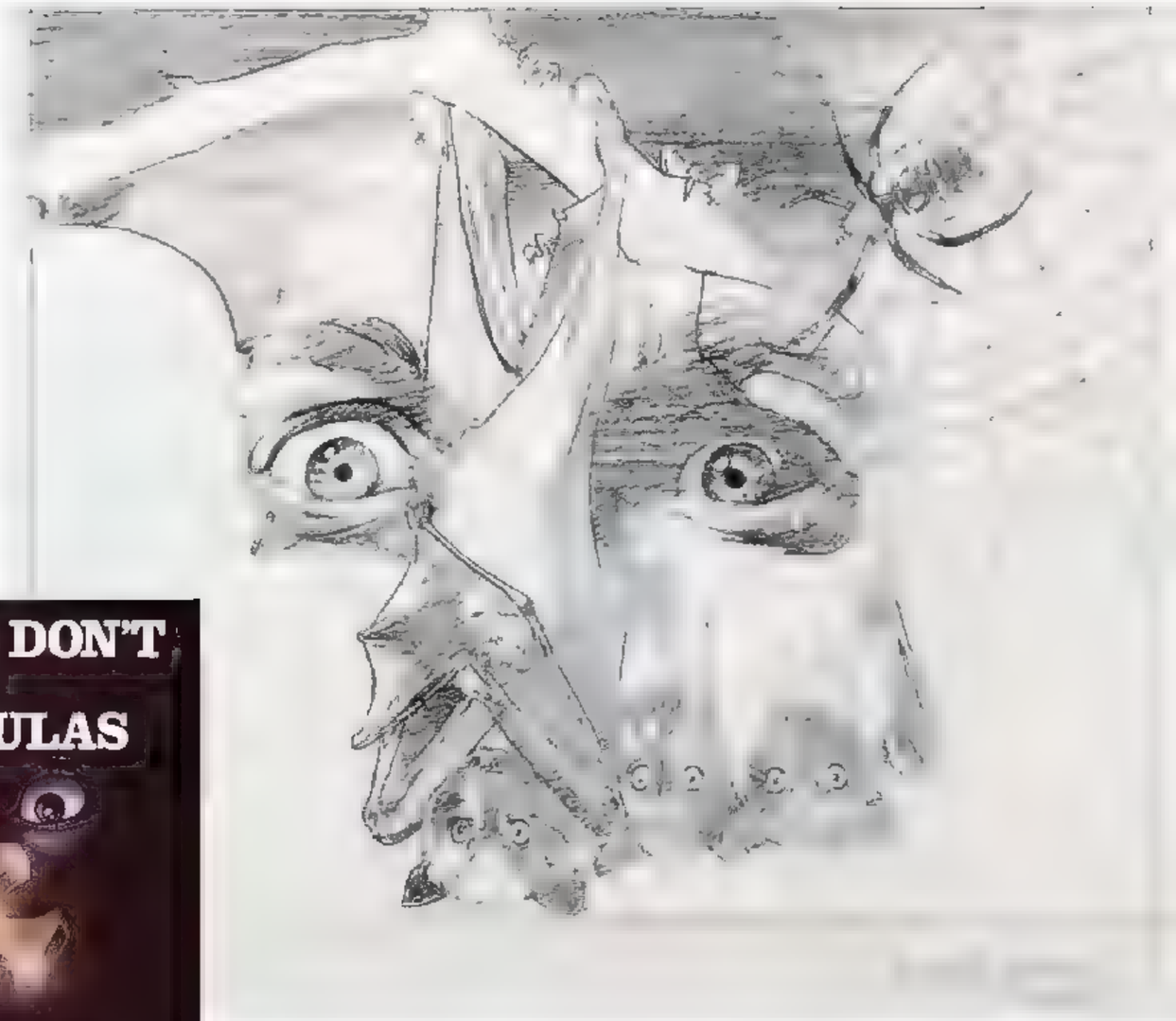
The cover used was meant to be on the inside. The actual cover was way cooler and more scary, but the gal in charge of marketing came into my office after Mike approved it, and said she'd pull it, because you 'can't have eyes in that place.'"

**STEVE HENDRICKS**

▲ Original cover art and eventual interior manual art for *Haunted House* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

▼ Ad for *Haunted House* (2600) which ran inside of comics from Warner Communications sister company, DC Comics

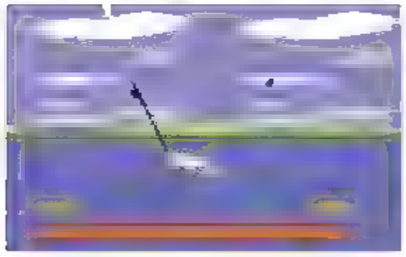


▲ Sketch concept for *Haunted House* (2600)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

# FROG POND

Developed by Atari in 1982, *Frog Pond* was ostensibly aimed at young children. In its simple gameplay, the player controls a frog, attempting to eat a variety of insects while missing very few. The game was completed and artwork was created, but for unknown reasons the game was never released. Coincidentally, *Frog Pond* bears more than a passing resemblance to the superior 2600 game *Frogs and Flies*, released by Mattel under its M Network name.



▲ Cover art for unreleased *Frog Pond* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

My first assignment in-house was *Math Gran Prix* and they had me working on it for months. I used a friend's children as models."

**WARREN CHANG**

▶ Cover art for *Math Gran Prix* (2600)
Artist: Warren Chang

▲ Interior manual art for *Math Gran Prix* (2600)
Artist: Warren Chang

# MATH GRAN PRIX

This math-powered racing game manages to transcend the dreaded "edutainment" label, mixing in strategy along with solving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division problems. While probably not the first pick for kids in the '80s, gamers could do a lot worse on the 2600.

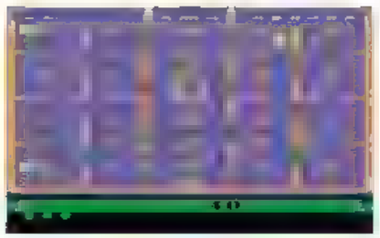
ATARI PAC-MAN (II) CARTOON (ONLY)

▲ Atari marketing executives believed the 2600 release of *Pac-Man* needed a more one-dimensional, literal interpretation of the character on the packaging, and this version was executed after two earlier attempts by Kimura, seen on the following pages
Artist: Hiro Kimura

That was actually a really cool piece of art. Upper management felt like, 'You're trying to elaborate too much, and let's get back to basics,'—basically a yellow ball with a mouth."

**JAMES KELLY**

▶ While still the runner-up to the art treatment at left, this version of Hiro Kimura's 2600 *Pac-Man* art was still used on cartridge labels because of time and expense considerations. This art was also seen on overseas releases and later U.S. reprintings.
Artist: Hiro Kimura



# PAC-MAN

Even in the 21st century, *Pac-Man* needs no introduction. The yellow dot muncher is a cultural icon, and was at the height of popularity in 1981. The arcade game broke records of all kinds and kicked off a "Pac-Man fever" that transcended the world of video games. A home console edition was an obvious option, and Atari paid handsomely for the exclusive rights to bring *Pac-Man* to the 2600. However, despite all the hype surrounding its 1982 release, and transcendent sales numbers, *Pac-Man* fans were deeply disappointed in the translation. The 2600 version didn't play much like the arcade, had a strange color scheme, and the ghosts flickered like mad. Wary gamers were burned by the experience, which would impact the entire video game market moving forward.

It was 80% finished when management asked me to change the direction. They became concerned that the 'ghosts' in it were too ferocious."

**HIRO KIMURA**

◂ Kimura surrounded by concept sketches for the 2600 version of *Pac-Man*

◂◂ This unfinished, unreleased cover art was Kimura's first adaptation of *Pac-Man* (2600). It is imaginative and wildly different than any visual interpretations of the character up to that point. It was eventually rejected in favor of a much safer, more conventional treatment of the title character.
Artist: Hiro Kimura

Atari's Home Computer Division was producing their version of the game. Since they were less restrictive concerning the package image, I took the liberty and designed Pac-Man as a boy-like character with a pair of sneakers and put him in a castle like maze. They were pleased with the illustration and asked me to do the manual centerfold as well, which became the 'Pac Man Strategy Meeting'"

**HIRO KIMURA**

▲ Manual interior art for *Pac-Man* (400/800)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

▲ Cover art for *Pac-Man* (400/800)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

▲ Final cover art for *Pac-Man* (5200)

◀ Unused cover art for *Pac-Man* (5200)

# PAC-MAN

## LICENSING A LEGEND


▲ Detail of National Pac-Man Day promotional jacket back

▲ Namco President Nasaya Nakamura and Atari's Joe Robbins signing the licensing agreement for the Consumer versions of *Pac-Man* in 1980

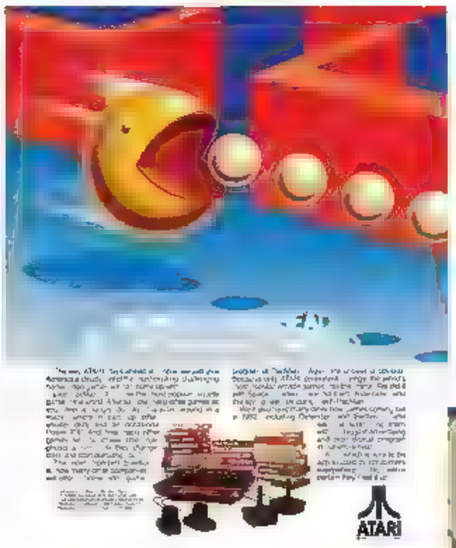
**ATARI HAD ALREADY** struck gold by licensing *Space Invaders*, the first killer app of the 2600 platform, and would unwittingly set events in motion to capture arcade lightning in a bottle again—in the form of a little yellow dot muncher.

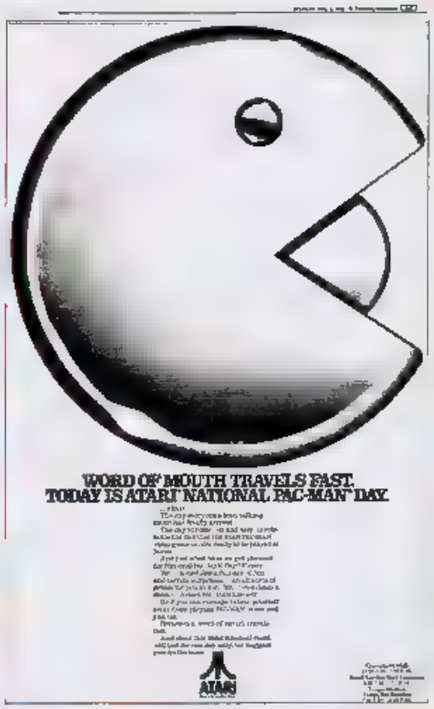
Former Atari Coin-Op President Joe Robbins had traveled to Japan to discuss legal matters with arcade company Namco. As part of the deal struck, Robbins came away with a new licensing agreement and the home rights to Namco's arcade game, *Pac-Man*. At the time, the ample, unsanctioned deal nearly cost Robbins his job, but when *Pac-Man* became a bona fide hit and cultural phenomenon after its 1980 release, the bold move to secure home console rights seemed prescient.

Programmer Tod Frye began work on the game in mid 1981, even though he was limited by the technical constraints of the 2600 and less physical memory than used in the Pac-Man arcade version. Frye's *Pac-Man* departed somewhat from the arcade game in both look and gameplay, especially since Atari required that he build a two-player version that didn't exist in the arcades. After its completion, the game was considered a technical achievement by fellow programmers, but that wasn't the end of the story.

In 1982, Pac-Man fever was still quite high, and Atari helped fan the flames with a $1.5 million dollar marketing campaign for the 2600 Pac-Man release, capped off with a multi-city launch dubbed "National Pac-Man Day" on April 3 of that year. Anticipation continued to grow, and a slew of pre-orders seemed to validate Atari's decision to manufacture more than 12 million cartridges—nearly two million more than the number of consoles already sold. The decision paid off for Atari—*Pac-Man* went on to become the company's best selling 2600 game ever, moving an estimated 7.7 million cartridges. Frye himself would earn more than $1M in royalties from that game alone.

However, game sales masked cracks in Atari's foundation. While the earnings reports were rosy, *Pac-Man* was not received as warmly in other arenas. Many video game magazine reviews were critical of the game's altered mazes, flickering ghosts, and overall lack of fidelity to the arcade version. Even though the technical specs of the 2600 made creating a mirror image of the arcade counterpart nearly impossible, fans were generally unaware of that fact—they just knew that this wasn't the game they loved. Critical reception was tepid, and Pac-Man slightly tarnished Atari's image in the minds of buyers. ■

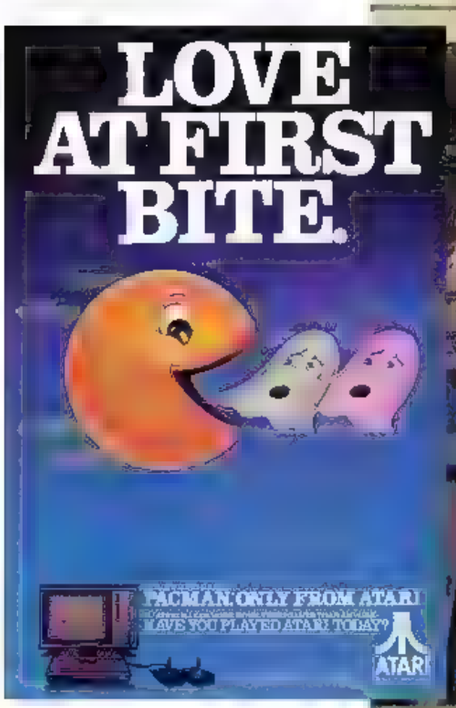



# THE DECISION TO LICENSE PAC-MAN FROM NAMCO PAID OFF FOR ATARI— IT WENT ON TO BECOME THE COMPANY'S BEST-SELLING 2600 GAME EVER.

◀ One of many newspaper ads run across the U.S. by Atari in support of "National Pac-Man Day"

▼ Pac-Man publicity photo for autographs and public appearances




▲ Atari *Pac-Man* Advertising

▼ Cover art for *Qix* (5200)
Artists. Hiro Kimura and Gjalt Van Der Wyk

PRODUCTION ILLUSTRATION DATE 8/18/82
TITLE 5200 QIX

# QIX

Atari cut no corners when trans ating Taito's *Qix* arcade game for the 5200. This conversion is a wonderful translation of the block draw ng strategy game where players must partition off portions of the screen, avoiding the villain *Qix* and other adversaries for the highest scores A un que and s ow-burn strategy game, *Qix* earns ts reputation as a cult favorite

# PHOENIX

Centuri's *Phoenix* arcade game is a bird-themed space shooter in the vein of *Galaxian* or *Galaga* and the 2600 version is quite faithful, managing to include all five levels of the original game. After securing the home license for the game, Atari took issue with third party publisher Imagic's game, *Demon Attack*, and sued for copyright infringement because of the similarities between the attacking birds. The companies settled out of court, and each game has a proper place in the 2600 library.

▲ Cover art for *Phoenix* (2600)
Artist: Randy Barrett

I used extra parts. You could buy models from *Star Wars*, so you didn't have to build from scratch. I was trying to do more airbrush, and I built the wings and used some walkers from *Star Wars*. I had fun building the models and the painting went quickly."

**TERRY HOFF**

▸ Unused artwork for Phoenix
Artist: Terry Hoff

Cover art for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)
Artist: James Kelly

[illegible] was probably my favorite one. I used a friend fellow illustrator Roger Hall [illegible] costume with [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] like [illegible] and they were [illegible] and pasted over the one of Roger I worked out

**JIM KELLY**

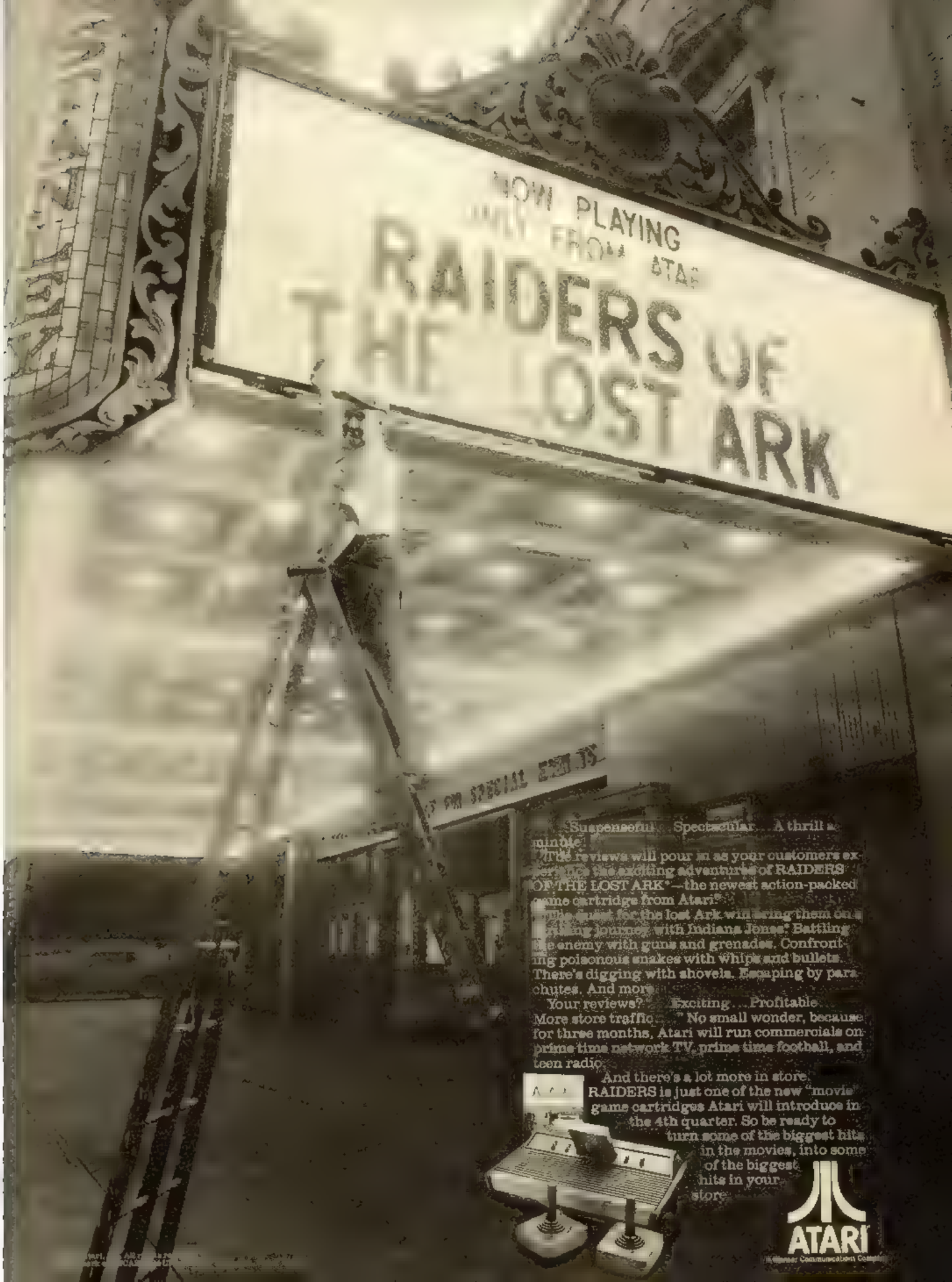
## RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones [illegible] for the 2600 [illegible]

◀▲ Manual interior art for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (2600)
Artist: Warren Chang


▲ POP display for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*

▶ Announcement ad for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*




"Suspenseful... Spectacular... A thrill a minute."

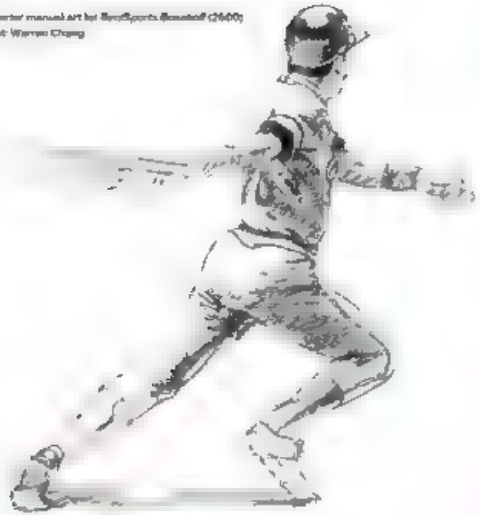
The reviews will pour in as your customers experience the exciting adventures of RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK*—the newest action-packed game cartridge from Atari®.

In the quest for the lost Ark, winning them on a thrilling journey with Indiana Jones.* Battling the enemy with guns and grenades. Confronting poisonous snakes with whips and bullets. There's digging with shovels. Escaping by parachutes. And more.

Your reviews? "Exciting... Profitable... More store traffic..." No small wonder, because for three months, Atari will run commercials on prime time network TV, prime time football, and teen radio.

And there's a lot more in store. RAIDERS is just one of the new "movie" game cartridges Atari will introduce in the 4th quarter. So be ready to turn some of the biggest hits in the movies, into some of the biggest hits in your store.

ATARI



▼ Interior manual art for RealSports Baseball (2600)
Artist: Warren Chang

PRODUCTION ILLUSTRATION

▲ Cover art for RealSports Baseball (5200)
Artist: D. Smith

# REALSPORTS BASEBALL

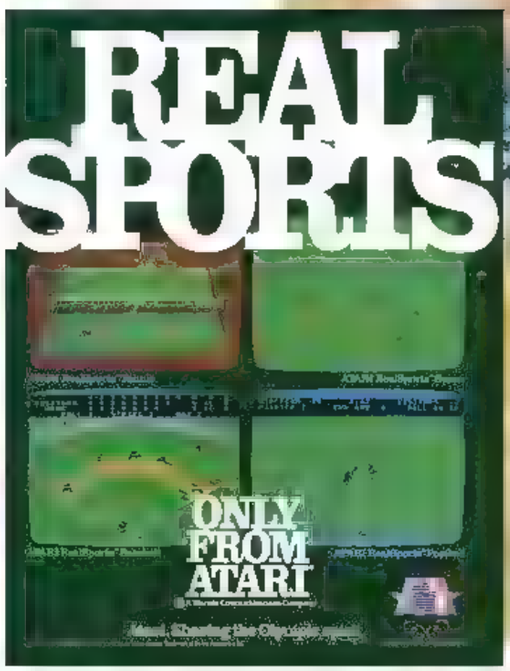
[illegible]



PRELIMINARY DATE 7/14/88
(FOR PROMOTIONAL USE ONLY)
TITLE BASEBALL
X

# REALSPORTS BASEBALL

▼ *RealSports* Olympic tie-in advertisement



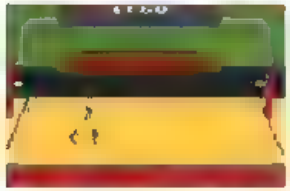

▲ Cover art for *RealSports Baseball* (2600)
Artist: Michel Allaire

◀ Interior manual art for *RealSports Baseball* (2600, 5200)
Artist: Warren Chang


▲ Logo for Atari's *RealSports* lineup of games

◆◆ Two different versions of cover art for Unreleased RealSports Basketball (5300)
Artist: Terry Hoff

▲ Cover art for unreleased RealSports Basketball (2600)
Artist: D. Smith



## REALSPORTS BASKETBALL

The only unreleased title in Atari's RealSports lineup, [illegible] of basketball was [illegible] Unlike RealTennis, [illegible] Doubles Dunk to get the well-off two-player action they crave.

They got squeamish and I put in a [illegible] on the cover. So I had to stamp him a loser by with a wide-[illegible] That was [illegible] at Atari, and I didn't take it personally.

**TERRY HOFF**

▶ Cover art for *RealSports Football* (2600)
Artist: Michel Allaire

I tried to capture exciting elements of the sport in one image."

**HIRO KIMURA**

▲ Cover art for *RealSports Football* (5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura


◀ Cover art for *Football* (400/800)

# REALSPORTS FOOTBALL

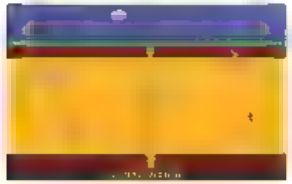
Atari upgraded its 2600 *Football* offering with a *RealSports* entry, and also renamed its 1982 *Football* for the 5200 to add the *RealSports* moniker. While each title is an improvement over the pigskin games offered previously on the 2600, it showed that sports games were generally not Atari's strength.


ATARI
ATARI
21
21

▸ Cover art for RealSports Volleyball (2000)
Artist: Terry Hoff

*RealSports Volleyball was going to be called Olympic Volleyball. [illegible] CD-ROM. Studios [illegible] the Olympic rings in the composition [illegible] with the proportion fields and be consistent with white and blue in the composition and trying to create a first person feel to the action. [illegible] the cover.*

**TERRY HOFF**

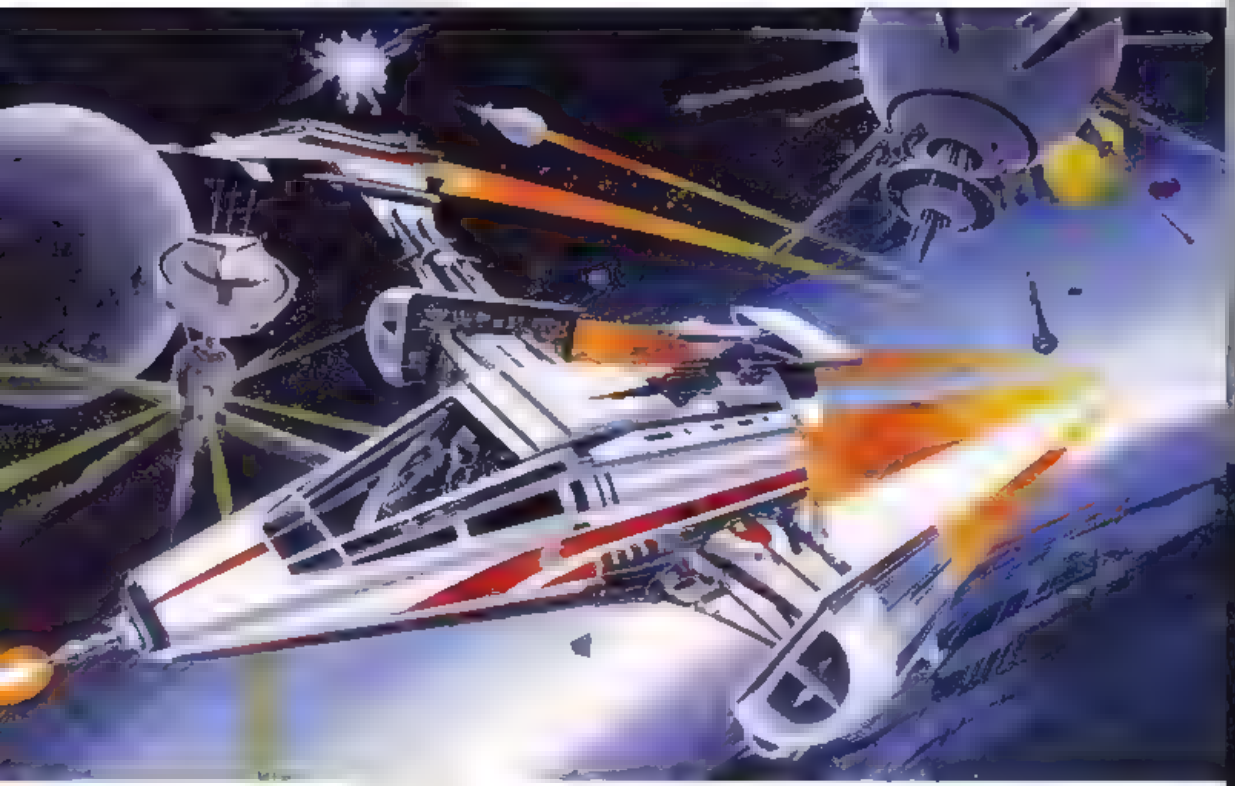


## REALSPORTS VOLLEYBALL

[illegible]

# SPACE DUEL

[illegible]

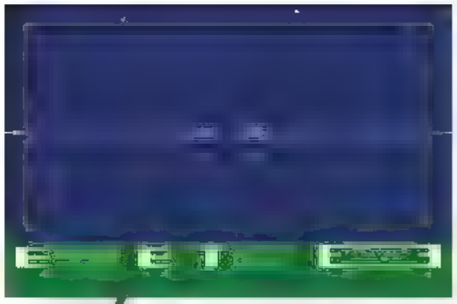


▲ Promo art for Space Duel (Arcade)
Artist: Marty Villamax

▶ Promotional photo for Space Duel (Arcade)

# STAR RAIDERS

This space combat simu ator was first re eased for Atari's 400/800 computers and critically-acc a med, serving as one of the "k ller app" games for the 8-bit computer line. Spawning a host of imitators and knock-offs, the first-person cockpit view and complex gameplay won over critics and gamers alike. Atari then translated the game for both the 5200 and 2600 consoles, and each was received well. Instead of attempt ng to replicate the game's complex controls on the single button joystick of the 2600, Atari sold *Star Raiders* with the pack n Video Touch Pad contro ler, a redesigned version of its numeric Keyboard Controllers, inc uding a *Star Raiders*-spec fic overlay.



▶ The Video Touch Pad, an exclusive pack-in controller sold together with the 2600 version of *Star Raiders*

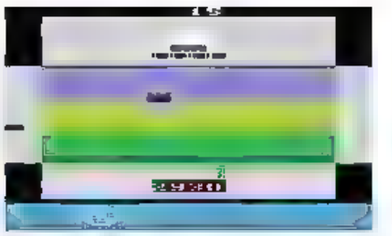
▲ Cover art for *Star Raiders* (5200)
Artist: Robert Hunt

▶ Cover art for *Star Raiders* (2600)
Artist: Terry Hoff


HYPER·WARP

▸ Cover art for Star Raiders (400/800)
Artist: McCormack

# SUBMARINE COMMANDER



This Sears-exclusive title was one of the rarest 2600 games released under the brand's Tele-Games label. Based on Midway's periscope arcade game, *Sea Wolf II*, you pilot a sub with a first-person periscope perspective, launching torpedoes, avoiding depth charges, and keeping your craft's mechanicals in the green.

▲ Unused cover art for *Submarine Commander* (2600)
Artist: Robert Hunt

# TEMPEST

The beautiful, fast-paced game of the same name stormed the arcades with its amazing gameplay and color vector graphics, but the title had a more difficult time making the transition to Atari's home consoles. Versions for both the 2600 and 5200 were started but neither was completed. A prototype box for the 2600 version had surfaced, which proved that artwork was created before the project was shelved.

▼ Cover art for unreleased *Tempest* (2600)

# SUPER BREAKOUT

The sequel to Atari's popular 2600 *Breakout* really just upgrades the classic *PONG*-style game, with a host of new variations, graphics, and sounds that change randomly every time the player resets the game. It's more of the same, but still manages to delight and keep the concept fresh. The 2600 version was a Sears exclusive for a time, before Atari decided to release it as well. The 5200 version of *Super Breakout* was also the pack-in game with that console on launch.

▼ Cover art for *Super Breakout* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

◀◀ Previous page: Detail of cover art for *Super Breakout* (2600)
Artist: Cliff Spohn

▶ Cover art for *Super Breakout* (5200)

▼ Unreleased cover art and packaging for *Super Breakout* (Handheld)
Artist: George Opperman


I came up with this scenario of being surrounded by this force field, so the color bar would feel like it was physically there. By putting it on the astronaut's helmet, it would help bring you back around to the artwork. It was a big burst of color across the top, and the arching on the glass would draw you down to the bottom of the art. It kept your eye moving around, rotating, keeping the viewer looking at it, through the whole piece."

**CLIFF SPOHN**

▲ Cover art for *Vanguard* (2600)
Artist: Ralph McQuarrie

# VANGUARD

Centauri's side-scrolling arcade game received solid ports from both the 2600 and 5200 systems, translating its gameplay and unique four-directional firing scheme well. This game cemented the 5200's reputation as a home for many great arcade translations. If the art of the 2600 version of *Vanguard* looks somewhat familiar, it's because artist Ralph McQuarrie's art has graced and influenced many groundbreaking films. His work included the original concept art for *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, and many others.


▲ Hand-drawn logotype for *Vanguard* home packaging

▲ Unused interior manual illustration for *Vanguard* (5200)
Artist: Terry Hoff

A Cavalier art for Vanguard (1200)
Artist: Terry Hoff

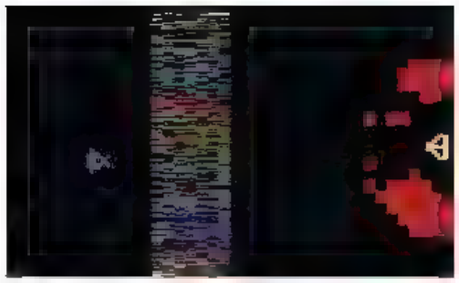
"It was kind of a *Tron*-like canyon but so many damn modes that would cannibalize them."

TERRY HOFF


A Cavalier reference and production line art for the "Arcade Fanatic" exterior graphic used on the Vanguard game packaging

# YARS' REVENGE

One of the most enduring and successful original games for the Atari 2600, *Yars' Revenge* was the first game by Howard Scott Warshaw. Originally conceived as a conversion of the popular arcade game *Star Castle*, Warshaw believed he couldn't do that title justice, and decided to create his own game using basic elements drawn from *Star Castle*. The name of the game is even a reference to then-CEO Ray Kassar—Ray spelled backwards to read Yar. Warshaw developed a detailed backstory for the game that ended up as part of an exclusive pack-in *Yars' Revenge* comic book.



▲ Interior manual art for *Yars' Revenge* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura


▲ Cover art for *Yars' Revenge* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

*Yars' Revenge* turned out to be my very first package illustration assignment after having done a couple of manga illustrations. I got the basic concept of the Yar, not as a gigantic fly, but as a chrome plated insect shooting spitballs. It was my first attempt rendering chrome surface and I recall struggling mightily with it. Perhaps the biggest reason for it was that I used airbrush almost exclusively for the very first time, a tool I still wasn't skilled at then."

**HIRO KIMURA**

# TERRY HOFF

**TERRY HOFF WAS** born in Prescott, Arizona, and attended San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, California, and the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. "I was just out of art school," he said, "taking my book around and trying to get freelance work. Atari had a finder's fee of $400 for new hires, and someone had seen my art. I did one freelance job and then went full-time there in-house in 1980."

Hoff explained the typical Atari process: "I'm not a gamer, and I wasn't a gamer then. A tech writer would explain the gameplay, and I developed a storyline, almost treating it like a fantasy or sci-fi story. Usually you were just on one game at a time. It was rewarding in that sense, to stay focused on one project. The fun of it was researching, being a private investigator. Illustrators today, they have all that info and inspiration at their fingertips, but I think that if something is harder to obtain, it's more valuable and memorable. Without research, you're losing touch with the source, and you don't spend time contemplating."

"It was rewarding because of the response from the programmers when they saw your visual solution—they were excited. To create these worlds that opened up—the game was just the beginning, and the art opened it up to people somehow, capturing the storyline. Making an exciting thing was hard. It was just fun work."

For Hoff, the challenges went hand-in-hand with the joy of working at one of Silicon Valley's most creative companies. "It was a great place to work. There were cute girls working there, and we got to paint all day. It was low-key. We just had to meet our deadlines, and I would just paint and do research, and build models for these. Working for Atari was a dream come true as an artist and young illustrator. I did my first cover for *Asteroids* 5200 on a freelance basis, and was soon hired full-time. I had my own office/studio, any supplies I needed, and a great group of creative people surrounding me. Coming into work was somewhat flexible because all they really cared about was meeting your deadlines."

ASTEROIDS ▪ COUNTERMEASURE ▪ MOON PATROL ▪ PHOENIX ▪ POLE POSITION ▪ REALSPORTS BASKETBALL
REALSPORTS TENNIS ▪ REALSPORTS VOLLEYBALL ▪ STAR RAIDERS ▪ SUPERMAN III ▪ SWORDQUEST WATERWORLD

## IT WAS REWARDING BECAUSE OF THE RESPONSE FROM THE PROGRAMMERS WHEN THEY SAW YOUR VISUAL SOLUTION—THEY WERE EXCITED.


▶ **Detail of promo art for *SwordQuest Waterworld* (2600)**
**Artist: Terry Hoff**

After a little more than a year as a staff artist, more than a dozen game covers and 10 interior illustrations, Hoff moved on from Atari. He continued creating video game cover art for companies like Broderbund, Nintendo and LucasArts, and then transitioned to movie posters, other types of illustration, and eventually into fine art. But even as it unfolded Hoff realized the influence that Atari—and his team—had made in the larger culture. "Atari resonated with so many people," he said, "and it had such an incredible impact in such a short amount of time."

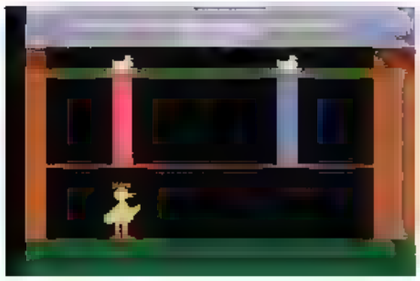
"I later got out of doing game art because I didn't want to get pigeonholed," he said. "As the animation got better, the artwork got worse. It wasn't that rewarding, because it was still the same amount of work." Hoff currently paints in an approach he calls "thoughtful play," and does commissions, while also teaching at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, his alma mater. ■

▲ Cover art for *Battlezone* (2600)
Artist: Chris Kenyon


▲ Dealer mobile for *Battlezone*

# BATTLEZONE

Atari's original tank game was an arcade hit, and warranted a translation for home consoles. Because of technical limitations, the 2600 game dropped the vector graphics, periscope perspective, and obstacles of the original *Battlezone*, but it still adds up to an enjoyable game. A 5200 version was developed to prototype stage, but never finished. Intriguingly, the arcade version so impressed video game playing soldiers with its realism and engagement that the American military commissioned its own version from Atari (known as the Bradley Trainer) for use in training gunners.

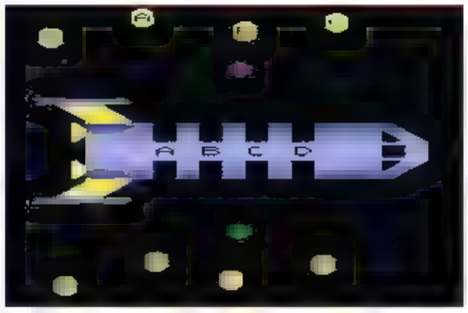


# BIG BIRD'S EGG CATCH

One part of Atari's line of licensed children's games, *Big Bird's Egg Catch* is an extremely simple game of anticipation, as Big Bird tries to catch falling eggs from one of two chutes. Utilizing the Kids' Controller (a redesigned version of the Keyboard Controller), the game features one of several exclusive, game-focused overlays.


▶ Game packaging for *Big Bird's Egg Catch* (2600)
Designer: Linda King
Artist: Gus Allen

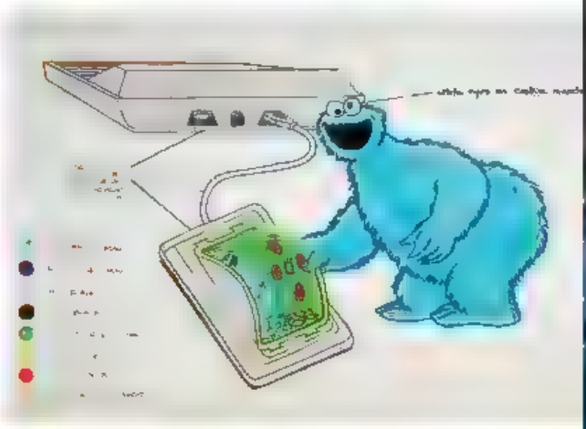
▼ Cover art for *Alpha Beam With Ernie* (2600)
Artist: Gus Allen

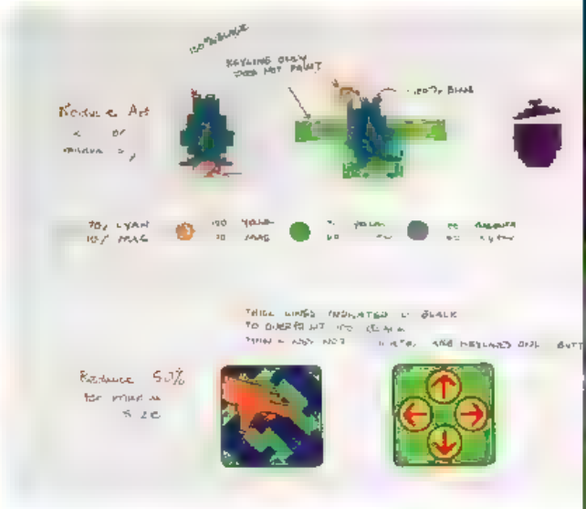




# ALPHA BEAM WITH ERNIE

In another licensed children's title, Ernie (of *Sesame Street* fame) ends up in this alphabet-based game, where kids must guide letters into the appropriate places on Ernie's space ship. A simple game aimed at young children, it is exactly as advertised

◀ Game packaging design concept for *Cookie Monster Munch* (2600)
Artist: Gus Allen
Designer: Linda King

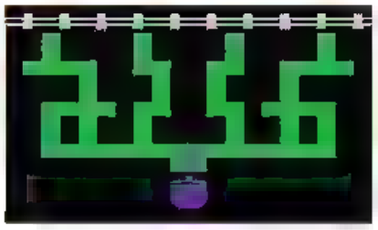




▲ Artwork and color guides used in manual illustrations for *Cookie Monster Munch*
Artist: Gus Allen

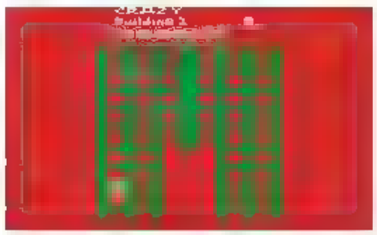
# COOKIE MONSTER MUNCH

Another entry in Atari's collaboration with the Children's Computer Workshop, the player guides Cookie Monster around a maze to catch and ultimately eat—you guessed it—cookies. This tasty video game lesson was originally called *Cookie Monster's Garden* and later *Cookie Monster's Maze*, before the title included the most-appropriate cookie-eating verb.



▲ Cover art for *Crazy Climber* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

# CRAZY CLIMBER



Atari licensed this unusual arcade title from Taito and Nihon Bussan Co in Japan, and made it their first Atari 2600 fan club exclusive game. Not available at retail, the game is one of the rarer first-party 2600 titles. The player controls a skyscraper-scaling hero who must dodge steel girders, condors, signs, and closing windows before reaching the topmost floors. Programmers Joe Gaucher and Alex Leavens ditched the complicated, two-joystick controls of the arcade in favor of the 2600's single joystick play, making the game a challenging one.

# HIRO KIMURA

**HIRO KIMURA WAS** born in a Buddhist temple in Kyoto, Japan. He studied art in Hawaii and California, graduating from Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. "I could hardly walk," he said, "when I began messing with my grandfather's treasured calligraphic brushes and sumi ink, much to his annoyance. Nonetheless, he encouraged me to draw by supplying me with an abundance of papers and crayons."

Right out of school, he was recruited by Atari art directors James Kelly and Steve Hendricks. While Kimura accepted an offer as staff illustrator, he was concerned about his ability to create the imagery needed to sell video games. "What really helped me," he recalled, "was my childhood love of superhero comic books. Thinking I'd outgrown the phase, I sort of put it aside as a past pass on. Unleashing it helped me get into the video game mindset."

Unlike some other Atari illustrators who didn't have a fondness for playing the actual games they depicted, Kimura did so as part of his immersion into the worlds he would render. "I played all the video games I illustrated, trying to capture the uniqueness and excitement of each game," he said. "It helped me tremendously in developing illustration ideas."

Kimura explained a basic process he used for each game assignment, as a steady stream of new works-in-progress were developed at Atari. "As I recall," Kimura said, "we were given approximately three weeks per game title. My approach was to first talk with the programmer to see what the game is about, and which features he'd like to see emphasized in the image. Then I played the game if it was available."

"The first week was spent on concept sketches. My challenge was how to capture and communicate to possible purchasers the essence of the game within the given package space. For each, I had to develop characters unless it was already done by licensees. Sketches were usually done in pencil. Once it was narrowed down to a few at the sketch meeting, I then worked on colored pencil sketches. Upon final sketch approval, I researched the necessary references and drew a full-sized line drawing during the second week. After it was approved, I then took it to the

BERZERK ▪ CENTIPEDE ▪ CRAZY CLIMBER ▪ E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL ▪ FROG POND ▪ GALAXIAN ▪ JOUST ▪ KRULL
MARIO BROS. ▪ MILLIPEDE ▪ PAC-MAN ▪ PELE'S SOCCER ▪ PENGO ▪ REALSPORTS FOOTBALL ▪ YARS' REVENGE

## "I PLAYED ALL THE VIDEO GAMES I ILLUSTRATED, TRYING TO CAPTURE THE UNIQUENESS AND EXCITEMENT OF EACH GAME."


▶ Kimura working on his initial concept for the Atari 2600 version of *Pac-Man*

final version and completed the illustration by the end of the third week. My favorite medium was acrylic, but I sometimes used an airbrush like in *Joust* and *Pengo*, with watercolor and Dr. Martin's Dye."

Fellow illustrator Terry Hoff provided added praise for Kimura's creative approach: "Hiro worked hard to capture that [game storyline], and had an incredible work ethic. He hardly ever worked from photo references—he understood form and broke things down into simple forms. He was very meticulous, using tiny brushstrokes and layers to build it up. He combined that with airbrush and it was impressive. That was fairly unique at the time. He was a good designer too."

Kimura also detailed his relationship with color as well, explaining his process more generally. "The way I use color is opposed—it's not how others see. I can look at objects as color shapes. The two things I felt I was weak in when I was a student were color and design. They turned out to be my strengths."

All told, Kimura spent nearly three years at Atari, and resigned just before the Consumer division was sold to Jack Tramiel in 1984. At that point, he was the only remaining in-house illustrator at Atari. Just months later, Kimura and his wife moved to New York City where he began the next stage of his career in freelance illustration, represented by graphic design icon Seymour Chwast at The Pushpin Group. Kimura's work as an illustrator has afforded him a wide variety of clients and projects, including stamps for the U.S. Postal Service, and commissions for Universal Studios, Reebok, Miller Brewing, *The New Yorker*, IBM, and many others. ■

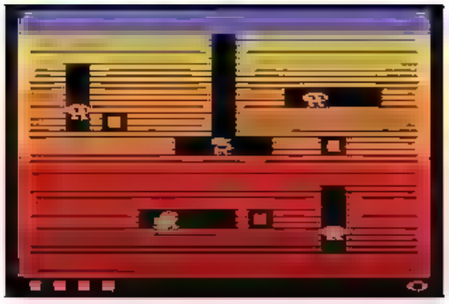
# CRYSTAL CASTLES

▲ Cover art for *Crystal Castles* (2600)
Artist: Judy Richter

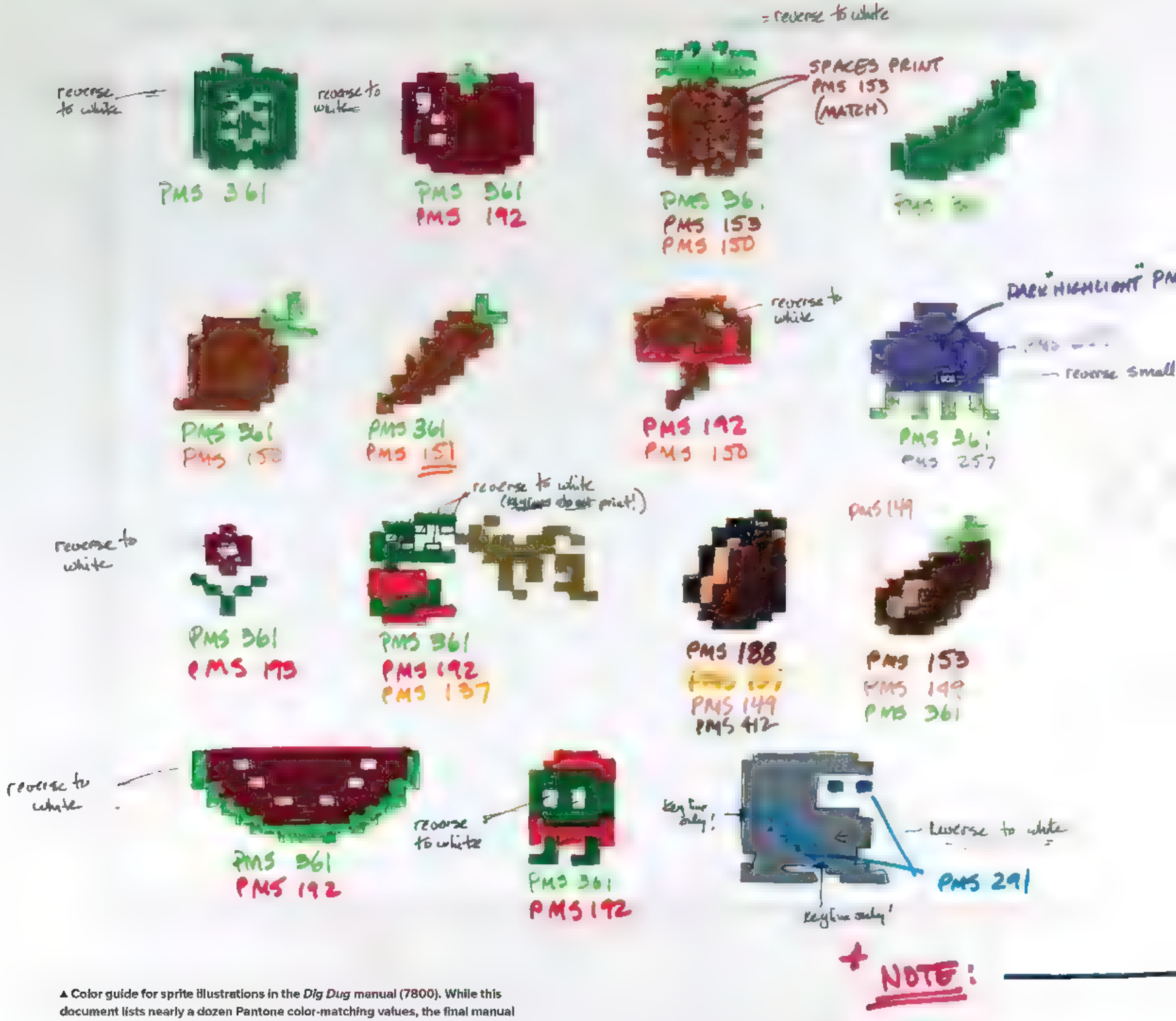
▲ Advertising art for *Crystal Castles* (Arcade)

# DIG DUG

In this conversion of the Namco arcade game, the player controls Dig Dug, the intrepid gardening miner. But the soil has become infested with Pookas and fire-breathing Rygars, both of which can be dispatched using a handy air pump within an elaborate series of underground mazes. A whimsical and fun concept, the game sports some of the most creative character design of any Atari game.




▲ Cover art for *Dig Dug* (2600)
Artist: Gus Allen




▲ Color guide for sprite illustrations in the *Dig Dug* manual (7800). While this document lists nearly a dozen Pantone color-matching values, the final manual was only printed in two colors as a cost-cutting measure

▼ Promotional artwork of *Dig Dug* principal characters
Artist: Mitchell Anthony

▼ Production artwork with comments for use on the Atari 2600 packaging

▲ Color logo art for *Dig Dug* (2600)

60% YELLOW

100% YELLOW/ 50% MAGENTA

70% CYAN

50% CYAN/ 40% YELLOW

20% CYAN

100% YELLOW/ 30% MAGENTA/ 20% BLACK

100% YELLOW/ 90% MAGENTA

100% BLACK

100% YELLOW/ 70% MAGENTA

40% YELLOW/ 30% MAGENTA

100% YELLOW/ 60% MAGENTA/ 30% CYAN

90% YELLOW/ 30% CYAN

30% YELLOW/ 20% MAGENTA

100% YELLOW/ 20% MAGENTA

* T.V. SCREEN FRAME TO BE 100% BLAC 40% CYA (OVERLAY)

* REDUCE TO 2 7/8" in width 12 1/2

TV SCREEN
TITLE: ATARI 2600 DIG DUG

☒ CARTON ☒ MANUAL FIGURE ◯

ARTIST: Date: 6/13/83

WRITER: Date: 6/13/83

SUPERVISOR: Date:

SEPARATOR: Date:

▲◀ Color guide, marker comp and approval forms for *Dig Dug* (400/800)

◀ Interior manual illustration for *Dig Dug* (5200)

▲ Cover art for *Donkey Kong* (400/800)
Artist: Lou Brooks

# DONKEY KONG

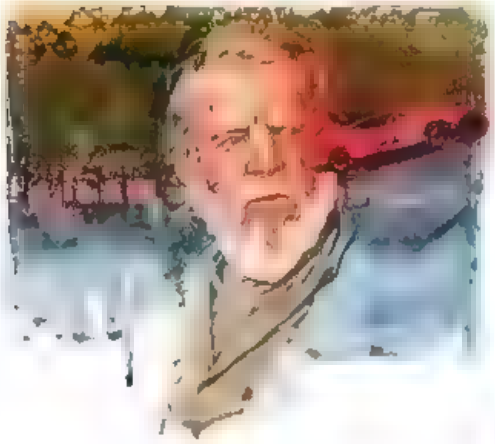

Before sharing adventures with his brother Luigi, Mario was a little-known plumber, but this game put him on the map. Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* was a smash-hit in the arcades, and console conversions were inevitable. While the 2600 version makes compromises to fit into 4K of memory available at the time, the Atari computer version replicates the challenging gameplay and all four screens of the arcade classic.

# DONKEY KONG JR.

The sequel to Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* turns the classic clash on its head, with little DK Junior seeking to rescue his trapped father from the clutches of—Mario! Yes, the intrepid plumber is cast in the role of the villain in this game, and Atari's 8-bit computer version is a solid translation of the popular arcade game.

▲ Color study for *Donkey Kong Jr.* cover art (400/800)
Artist: Lou Brooks

◀ ▶ Unpublished thumbnail artwork concept art for *Dukes of Hazzard* (2000) artist: Warren Chang



## DUKES OF HAZZARD

Atari never released a game based on this popular 80s TV show starring two country cousins and their orange Dodge [illegible] The general concept was [illegible] driving. The game's [illegible] different versions of Dukes of Hazzard in the Atari 2600 – one a racing simulation and another based on its [illegible] Stunt Driver. The 2600 prototype was [illegible] never released. The [illegible] driving [illegible] for the game was created by Warren Chang. When the game was [illegible] Chang explained that work was halted on any additional iterations.

# GALAXIAN

[illegible] across the screen earned him a software patent.

■ Cover art for *Galaxian* (5200)
Artist: James Kelly


▶ Logo artwork for *Joust* packaging (2600/5200)

▶ Cover art for *Joust* (2600, 5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

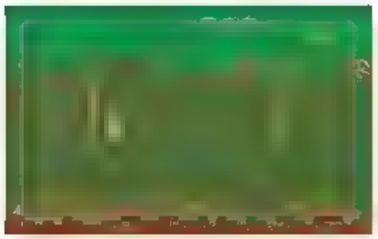
# JOUST

Potentially winning an award for the most bizarre game concept, this game unfolds the tale of jousting knights astride flying ostriches! *Joust's* great two-player action allows players to cooperate in collecting eggs, avoiding lava and destroying other rival knights—or going head-to-head in battle. The 2600 and 5200 versions replicate the best parts of the classic arcade game.

▲ Advertising art for *Joust* (2600, 5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura


▲ Game packaging for *Jungle Hunt* (2600)
Artist: Chris Kenyon

▲ Packaging art for *Jungle Hunt* (5200)
Artist: Chris Kenyon

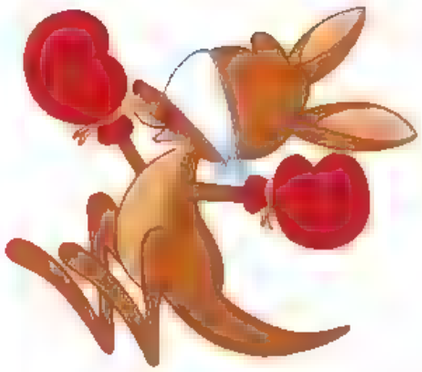


## JUNGLE HUNT

In *Jungle Hunt*, the player is Sir Dudley Dashly, an English big-game hunter traversing the terrors of the jungle to rescue his wife, Lady Penelope, from a tribe of cannibals. In the 2600 version, Sir Dudley swings across vines, swims with hungry crocodiles, leaps over rolling boulders, avoids angry tribesmen, and apparently bears only a passing resemblance to Activision's Pitfall Harry. The jungle is clearly big enough for all


▲ Production art for *Jungle Hunt* (5200)
Artist: Chris Kenyon

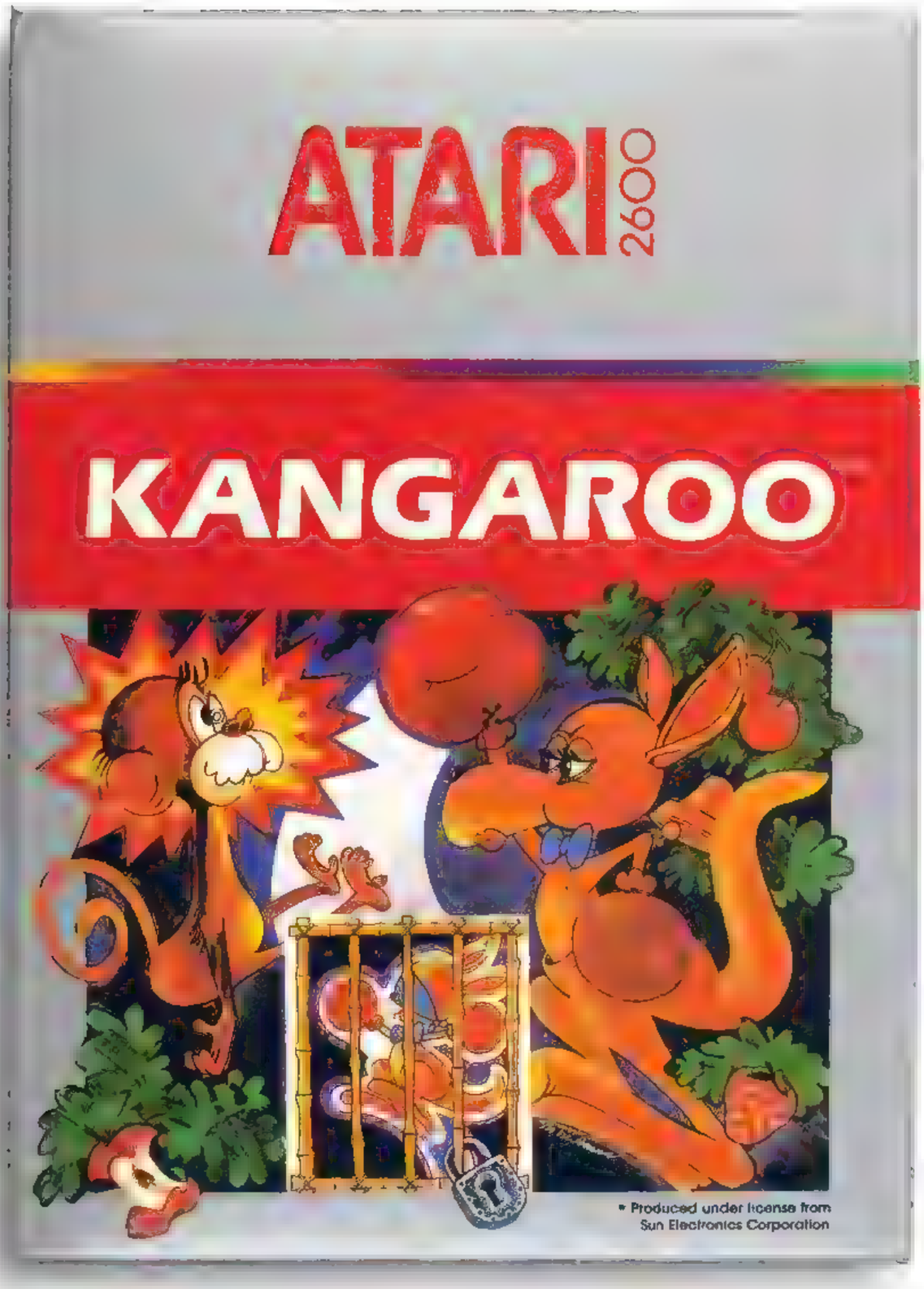
◂ Game packaging for *Kangaroo* (2600)
Artist: Marty Viljamaa



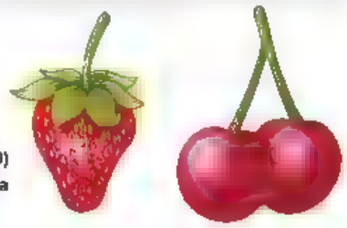
▲ Interior Manual art for *Kangaroo* (2600)
Artist: Marty Viljamaa

# KANGAROO

Mother Kangaroo has lost her baby! Mean monkeys have stolen her joey, and Momma will punch, jump, and block flying apple cores to rescue the little one. This translation of the arcade game by Japanese Sun Electronics makes for a great round of boxing-gloved adventuring, Kanga-style! The winsome duo of mother and son were also popular enough to warrant their own segment on the CBS Saturday morning cartoon series, *Saturday Supercade*.




▸ Interior Manual art for *Kangaroo* (2600)
Artist: Marty Viljamaa



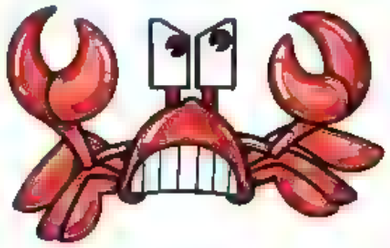
# KRULL

One of a handful of early movie-adaptations, *Krull* draws from the sci-fi fantasy epic by Columbia Pictures

mechanics, *Krull* is one adaptation that transcends its source material.

▼ Cover art for *Krull* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

◂ Cover art for *Mario Bros.* (5200)
Artist: Hiro Kimura



▲ Interior manual art for *Mario Bros.* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

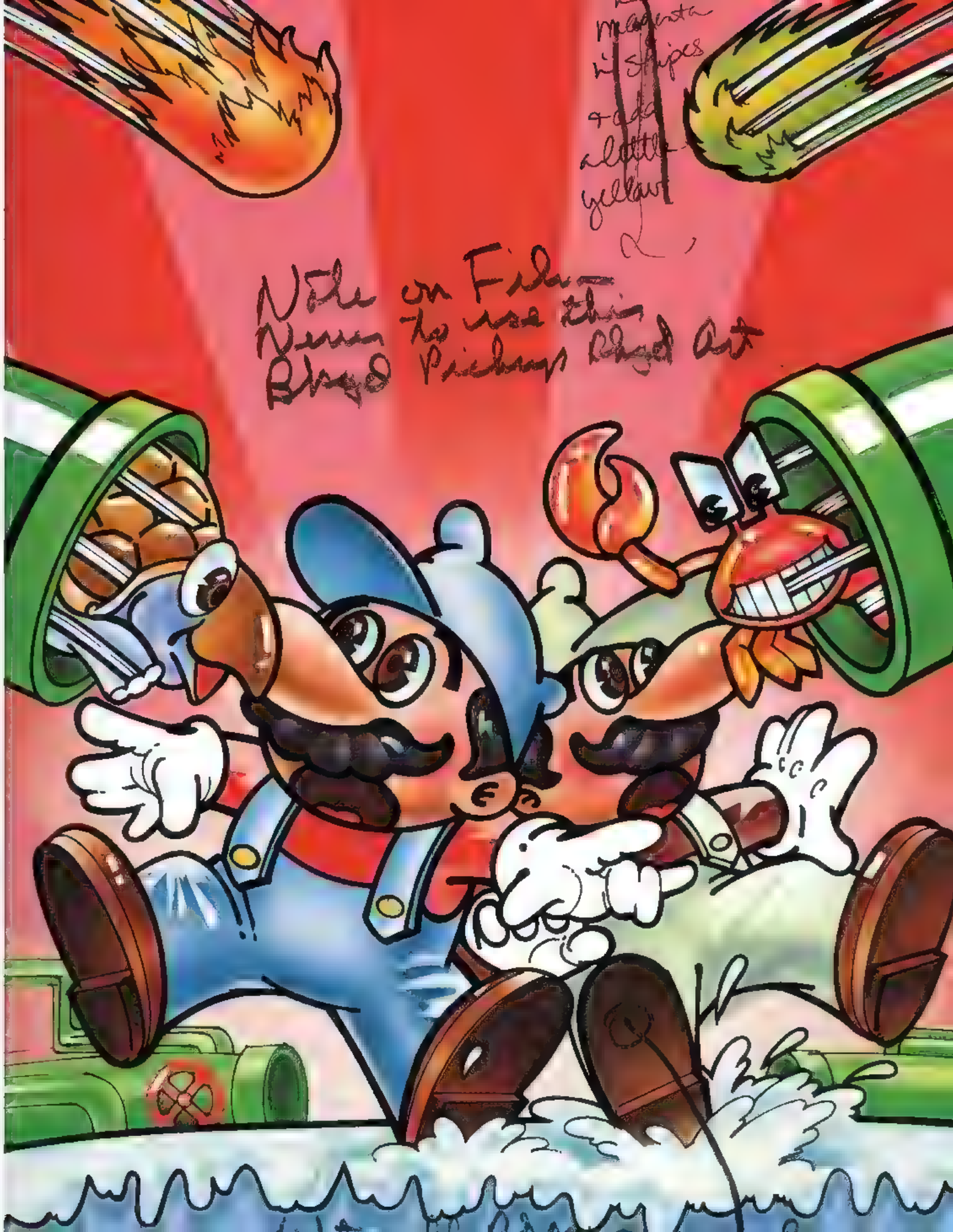
▸ Production art of manual interior for *Mario Bros.* (2600)
Artist: Hiro Kimura

# MARIO BROS.

After Mario's turns in *Donkey Kong* and *Donkey Kong Jr.*, he was ready to share some of the spotlight with a relative—namely, his trusty brother, Luigi. Before they were Super, the plumbing duo fought an onslaught of turtles, crabs and bugs that infested their water pipes. In this arcade translation for both the 2600 and 5200, With echoes of what would make them famous on the NES, the pair hurl fireballs and bump platforms in great, simultaneous two-player action.

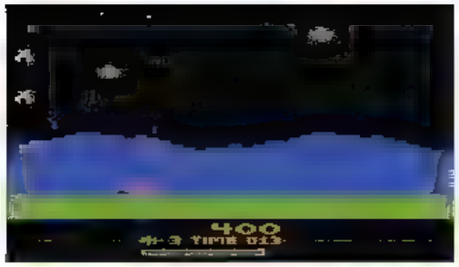
There were quite a few requirements depicting the heroes that I had to adhere to. After all, Mario was already very popular from his role in *Donkey Kong* and there was very little I could do except to make the character a little more three-dimensional. To maintain the original flavor, I used thick outlines to depict the characters."

**HIRO KIMURA**


magenta
w/ stripes
+ add
a little
yellow
Note on Fish
Seem to use this
Blue Pinkish Red a+
Blue

# MOON PATROL

Atari's translated the Williams arcade lunar buggy game for both the 2600 and 5200, with great results. Leaping chasms, destroying boulders, and shooting enemies, the player's intrepid rover rides faithfully for both consoles. The 2600 version was outsourced to trusted Atari collaborators at General Computer Corporation (GCC), while the 5200 version was created in-house.



▼ ▶ Interior manual art and production art for *Moon Patrol* (2600)
Artist: Terry Hoff



▲ *Moon Patrol* logo art (2600)

◀◀ Previous page: Detail of cover art for Moon Patrol (5200)
Artist: Warren Chang

▶ Cover art for *Moon Patrol* (5200)
Artist: Warren Chang

# MS. PAC-MAN

[illegible] Ms. Pac-Man [illegible] Pac-Man [illegible] Midway [illegible] game [illegible] into the [illegible] audience [illegible] Pac-Man [illegible] 2600 [illegible] 5200 [illegible] 1983.


▼Cover art for *Ms. Pac-Man* (5200)
Artist: Gus Allen

▲ Catalog montage art
Artist: Mitchell Anthony

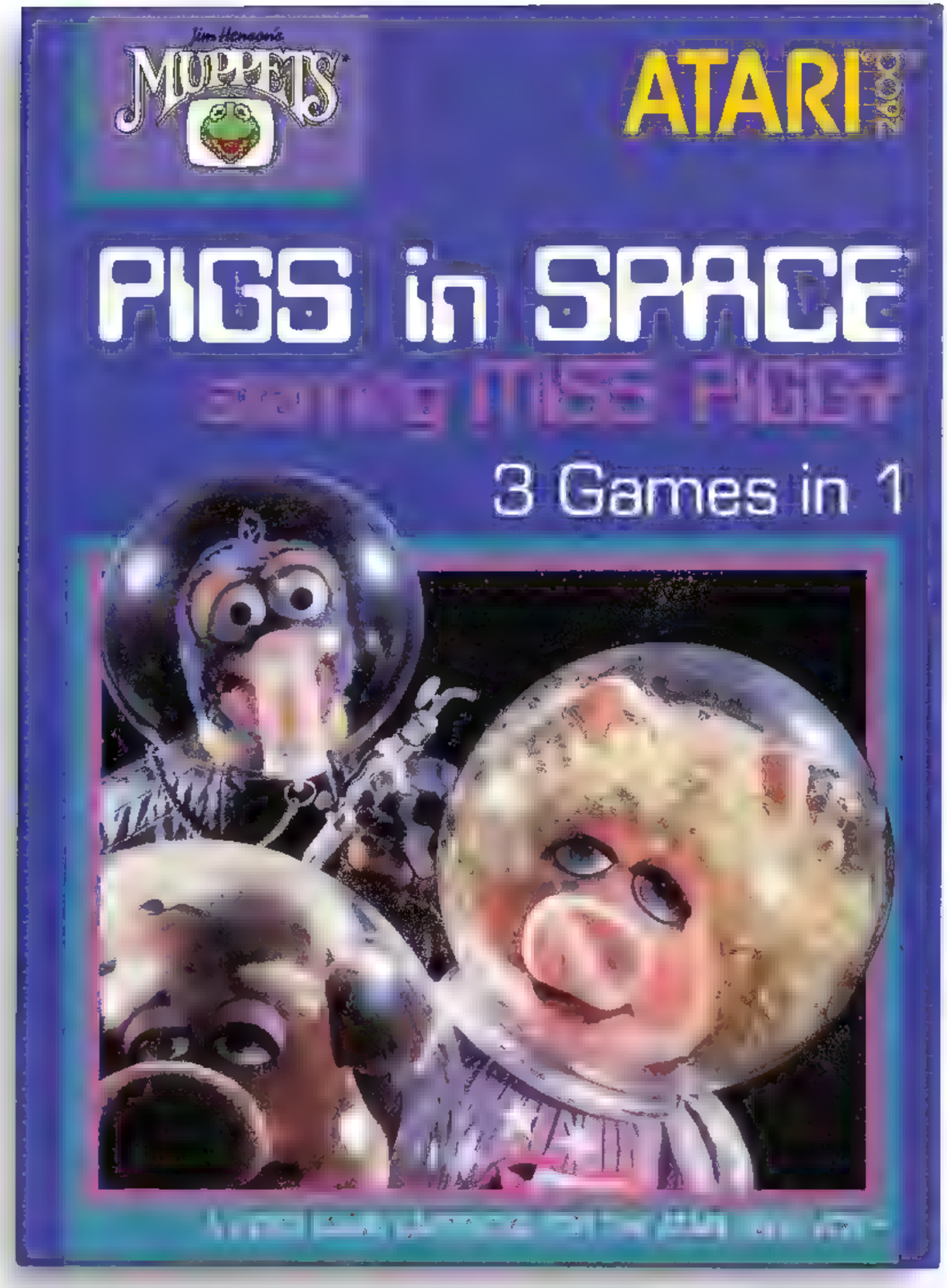

▲ Game packaging for *Oscar's Trash Race* (2600)
Designer: Linda King
Artist: Gus Allen

## OSCAR'S TRASH RACE

*Sesame Street's* surly, garbage can-wearing Muppet received his own game as part of Atari's children-focused line of titles. In it, the young player matches the number of objects with Oscar's trash can, and follows directional arrows to practice learning the concepts of left, right, up and down. The game is slightly more challenging than other entries Atari aimed at children, so it really isn't garbage.

## PIGS IN SPACE

Based on an act of the same name from the te ev sion series, *The Muppet Show*, this licensed kids' game was the last of Atari's children-focused line. *Pigs in Space* is unique in that it contains three different mini games

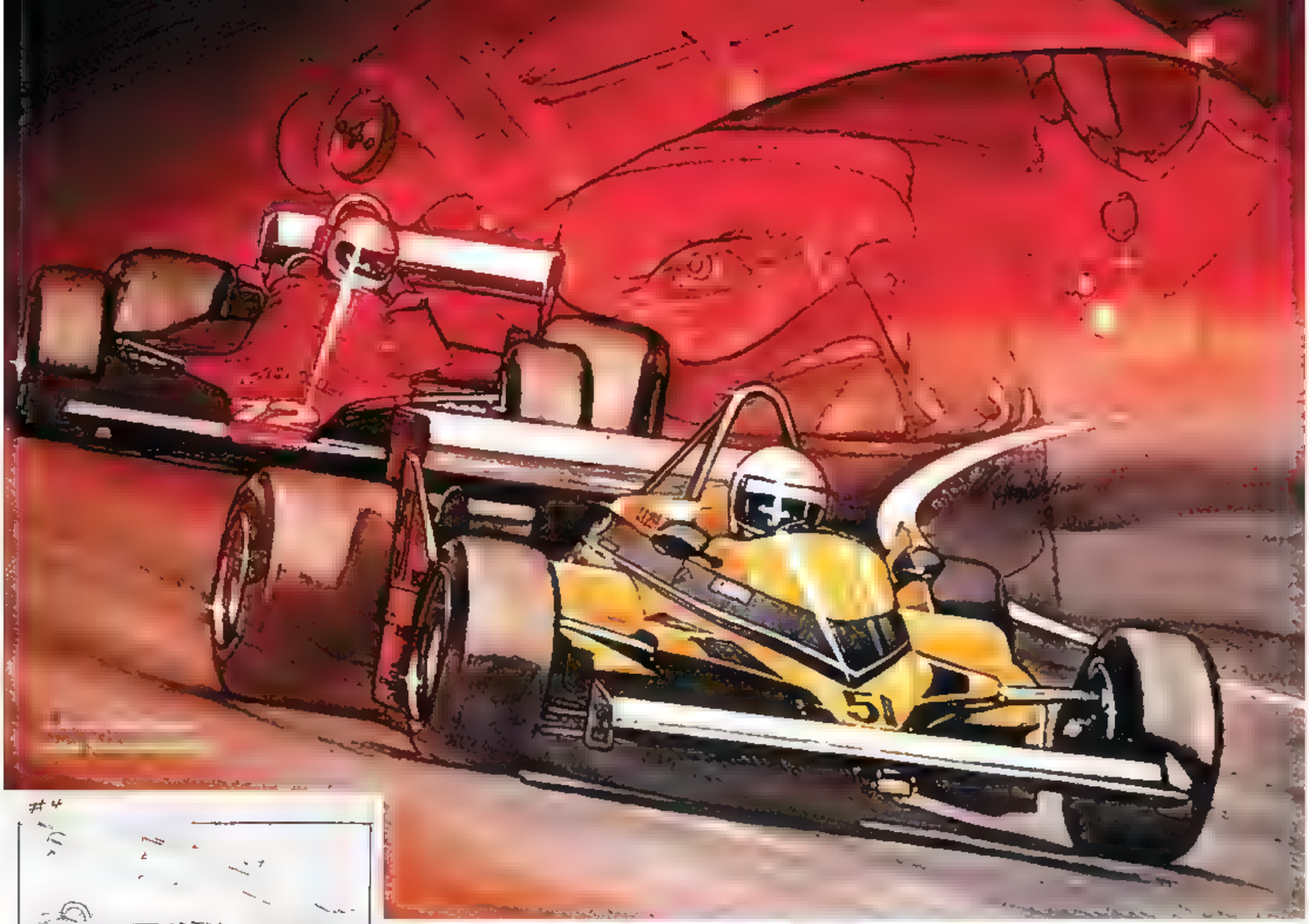


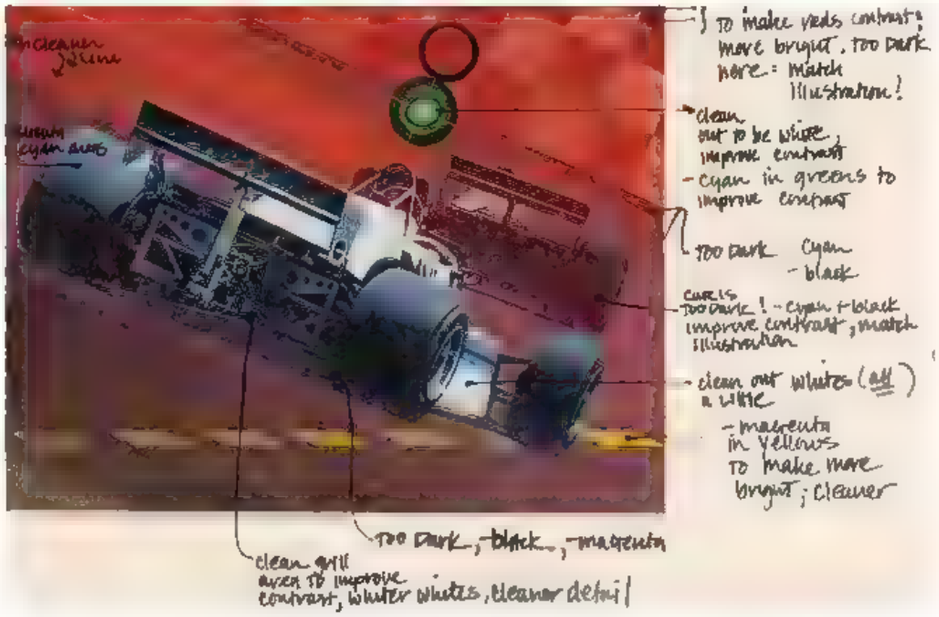

▲ Game packaging for *Pigs In Space* (2600)
Designer: Linda King

# POLE POSITION

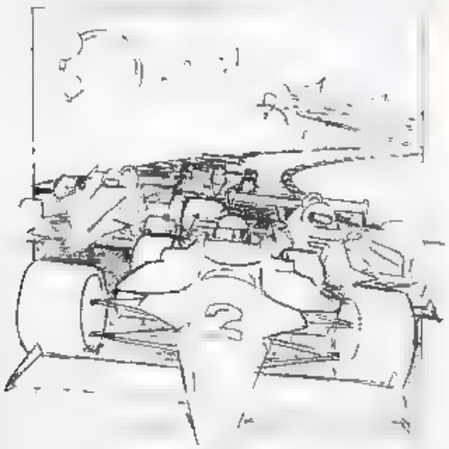
A model for nearly every modern racing game, *Pole Position* was a hit in its arcade incarnation, and wheels spinning with the oddly-sequeled *Pole Position II*, the pack-in game for the 7800

▲ Promotional art for *Pole Position*. Artist: Greg Winters




▲ Production art for *Pole Position* (5200)
Artist: Terry Hoff




◀ Sketch concepts for *Pole Position* (2600)
Artist: Greg Winters

# POLE POSITION

▲ Cover art for *Pole Position* (5200)
Artist: Terry Hoff

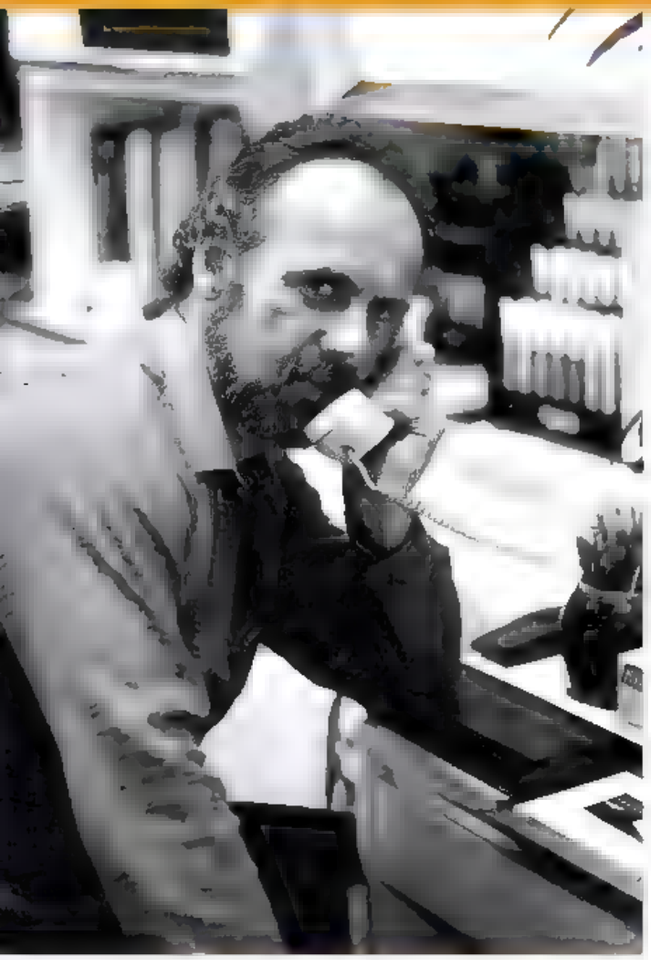
▲ Art for *Pole Position* (2600)
Artist: John Mattos

*Pole Position* was one of my favorites, because I got to paint an Indy car! I always treated the games as first-person fantasies, and wanted to communicate that on the covers. My painting made the car the hero this time, from the back of the car with a big tilt and diagonal design that I wanted to emphasize, allowing me to use a kind of pop art graphic shape to indicate the race track in the background."

**TERRY HOFF**

▶ Promo art for *Pole Position II* Kit (Arcade)
Artist: Marc Ericksen

# JAMES KELLY



**JAMES KELLY WAS** born in Wisconsin in 1945, the son of an artist mother and an architect father. At 10, he was tutored by an accomplished portrait artist, Abraham Nussbaum. "When I was ten years old," he said, "I sold my first painting for $100, and I was off and running." In his early 20s he briefly studied at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles and the Academy of Art in San Francisco.

"I had a passion and a talent for it at an early age. I've been an illustrator, a graphic designer and a portrait artist all of my life." He was working as an independent illustrator when he began moving in circles that contained Nolan Bushnell, Steve Jobs, and Steve Wozniak, which led to work for each of them.

In 1977, Kelly came to work full-time as art director at Atari, initially in the Coin-Op Division. Later, with growth in the home consoles, he moved to the Consumer Division, in charge of the illustration department. There he supervised young artists and was responsible for hiring new talent from local universities like Art Center in Los Angeles. "Atari happened sort of overnight," he explained, "and all of a sudden they realized they needed to hire to bring all this [illustration work] in-house, instead of farming it out. It started out as a handful of us—Evelyn [Seto], Bob Flemate—and we began."

"We created a lot of great artwork," he said. "I was involved in just about every piece of packaging art we did. I did layout, and on rare occasions I did the finished art too. We had to make it up as we went along, because there was no one to copy!"

While Kelly enjoyed six years at Atari, even amidst the company's explosive growth in the late '70s and early '80s, he wasn't prepared for its success. "I thought this was just a flash in the pan, and I'll jump in while it's cooking, and keep my nose to the wind. When it starts sinking, I'll leave—but it didn't happen." Atari had riotous success, at one point becoming the fastest growing American company in history. "Atari was the only corporate job I ever had," Kelly said. "Atari actually became quite renowned in the commercial art world as one of the places that bought and printed great commercial artwork."

After leaving Atari, Kelly returned to both schools he attended to teach classes for a time, and then moved into fine art. "I had transgressed into the fine art world, and out of the commercial art world—and that's what I still do. I do a lot of portraits, painting people. I did a lot of celebrities—Joe Montana, Will Clark. I enjoyed that—they were jobs I got because I could paint people accurately."

DODGE 'EM • GALAXIAN • MAZE CRAZE • PELÉ'S SOCCER • RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK

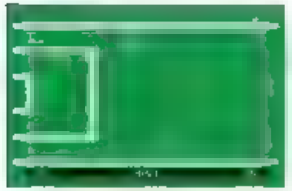
▲▼ Interior manual art for Atari VCS (2600)
Artist: James Kelly

## "WE CREATED A LOT OF GREAT ARTWORK. WE HAD TO MAKE IT UP AS WE WENT ALONG, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ONE TO COPY!"

With those changes, Kelly also saw the decline of illustration work in the industry itself, because of the increased popularity and the rise of off-the-shelf desktop publishing tools. "When the computer came up and got sophisticated enough that you could buy graphics programs, nobody was going to pay $5,000 to commission a piece," he explained. "I know a few people that are in the art world. One thing that helps and allows you to make a living, is if you're good at it. I feel blessed, because I've been able to keep doing it. If I wasn't getting paid for it, I would do it for free." ■

▸ Cover art for *RealSports Soccer* (1200)
Artist: Steve Hendricks

▸ Unused cover art for *RealSports Soccer* (1200)
Artist: Chris Kenyon



# REALSPORTS SOCCER

With plenty of room to improve upon Atari's Soccer, Atari released its *RealSports Soccer* in the 1980 [illegible] *Atari Soccer* [illegible] the Sears Tele-Games version, yet a wide-open game [illegible] the game's keyboard [illegible] was originally named Soccer before being [illegible] with the *RealSports* name.

◀ Production art for *RealSports Tennis* (5300)
Artist: Warren Chang

▶ Cover art for *RealSports Tennis* (2600)
Artist: Terry Hoff

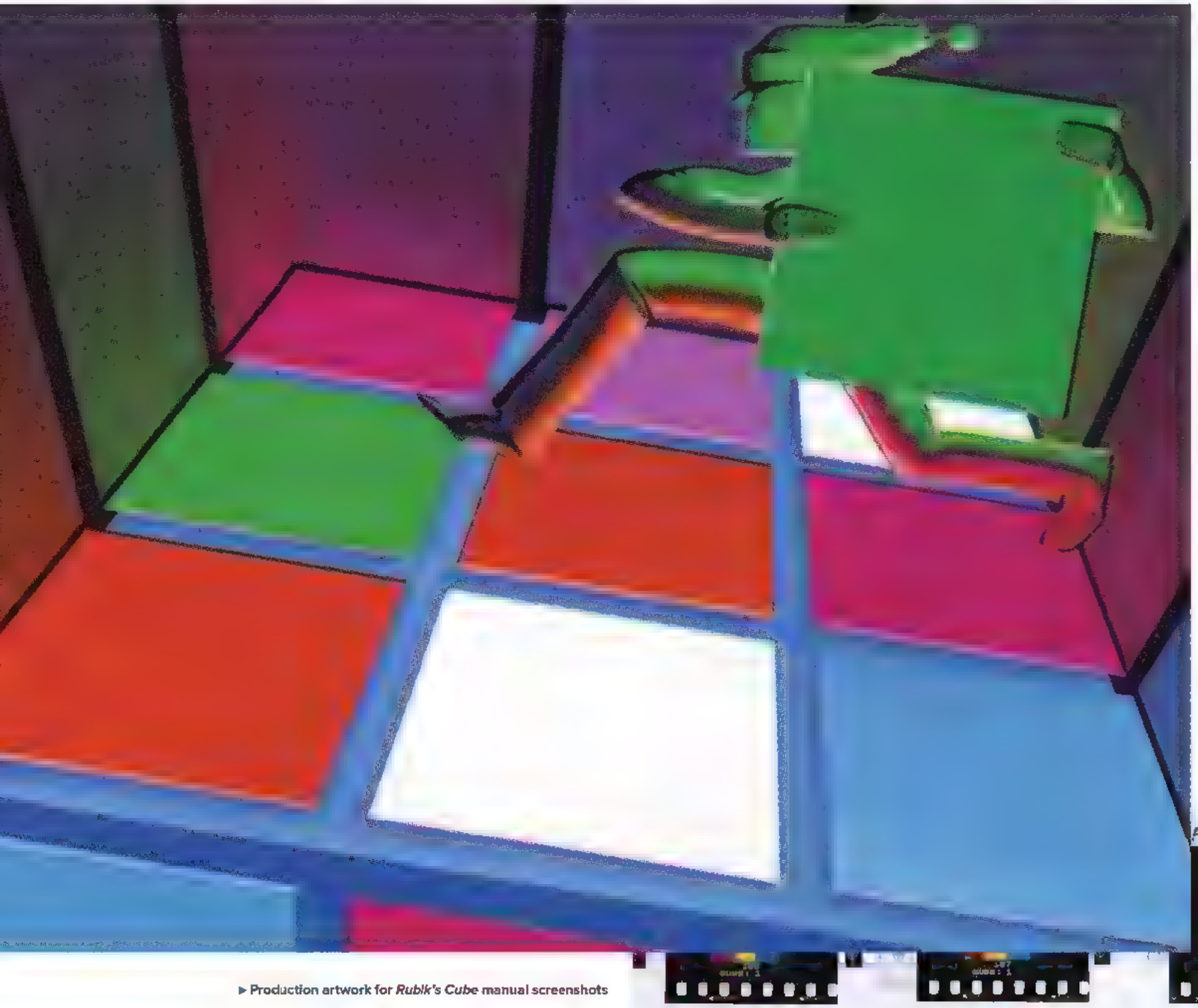
# REALSPORTS TENNIS

[illegible] *RealSports* [illegible] titles uses a two-player [illegible] version of Atari's [illegible] 3-D [illegible] that improved on an earlier Tennis game release by the [illegible] publisher Activision.

# RUBIK'S CUBE

This title was Atari's attempt to capitalize on the puzzle game craze of the '80s by tweaking and rebranding its *Atari Video Cube* into a licensed *Rubik's Cube* game. The final *Rubik's* version is marginally different than the previous Atari release, but both versions shared the same artwork. The unused artwork at right has a much more cerebral take on the game concept


▼ Cover art for *Rubik's Cube* (2600)




▶ Production artwork for *Rubik's Cube* manual screenshots

▶▶ Unused cover art for *Rubik's Cube* (2600)
Artist: Burrell Dickey

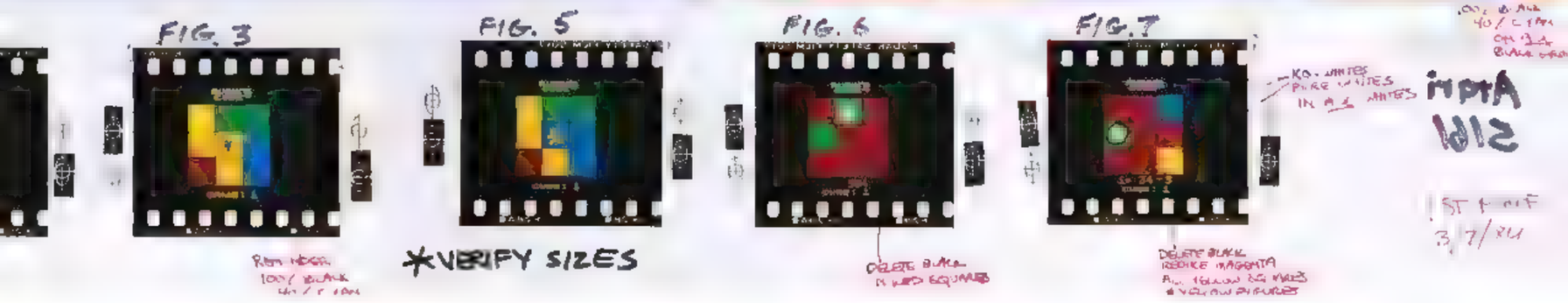


FIG. 3
FIG. 5
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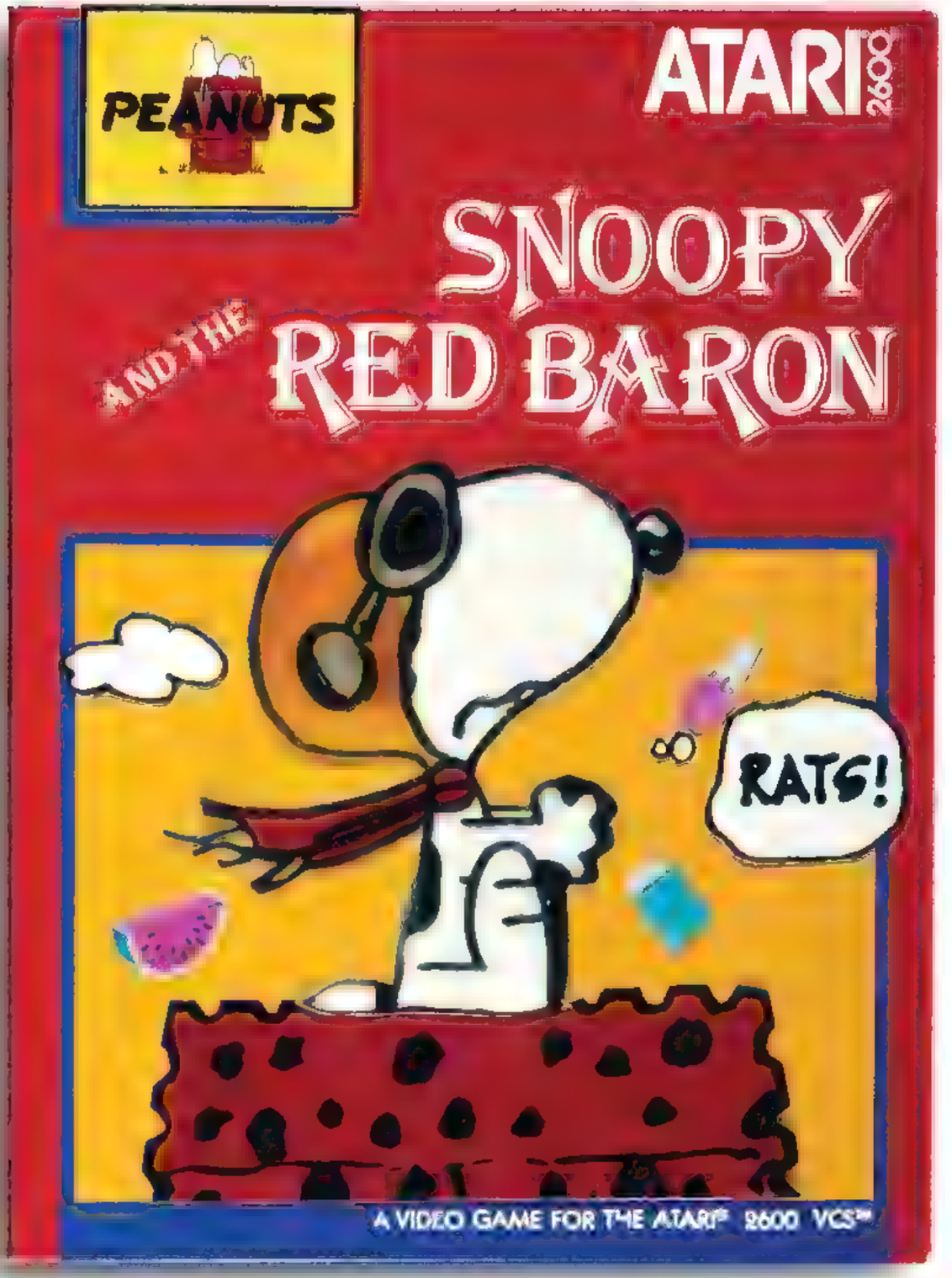
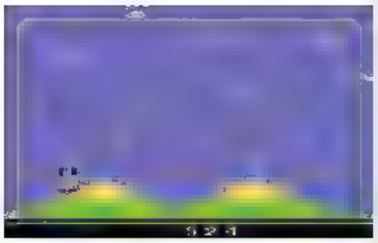
*VERIFY SIZES




▲ Game packaging design mockup for *Snoopy and the Red Baron* (2600)
Designer: Linda King

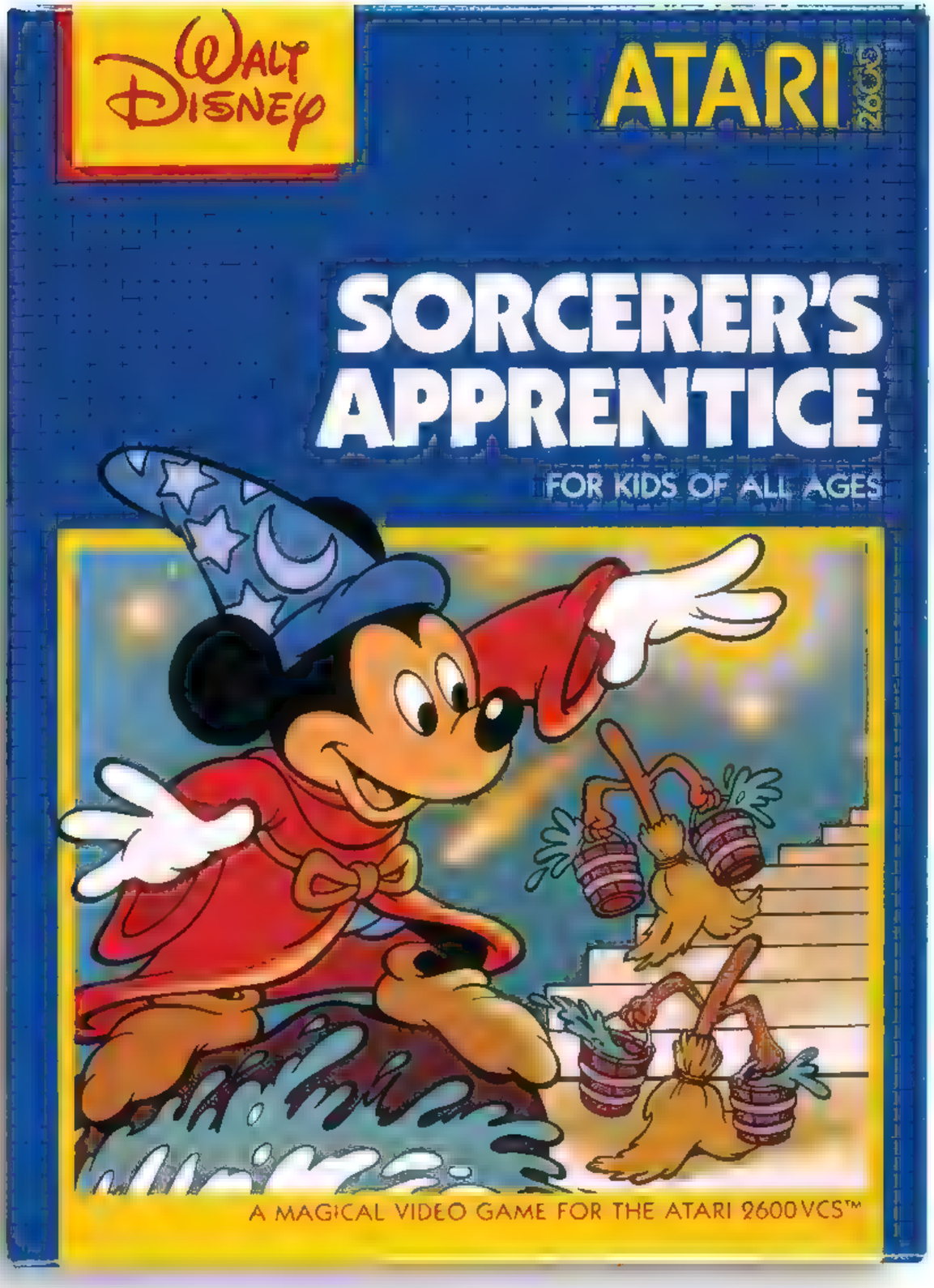
## SNOOPY AND THE RED BARON

The imaginative beagle of *Peanuts* fame got his own game, which is an ode to Snoopy's WWII flying fantasy. The player must pilot Snoopy's airborne dog house, in an attempt to ground the Red Baron and pick up bonus items. While not as challenging as other 2600 games, it stands above all the other kid-oriented Atari titles. Another *Peanuts* licensed game, *Good Luck, Charlie Brown*, was developed but not finished.



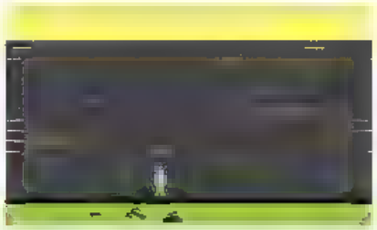
## SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

The only one of four Disney-licensed games to actually be released by Atari, *Sorcerer's Apprentice* is based on one segment of the animated film, *Fantasia*. As the apprentice, the player helps Mickey Mouse to catch or shoot falling stars and to bail water out of the basement carried by walking broomsticks. The concept sounds strange, but makes much more sense in the context of the classic film.



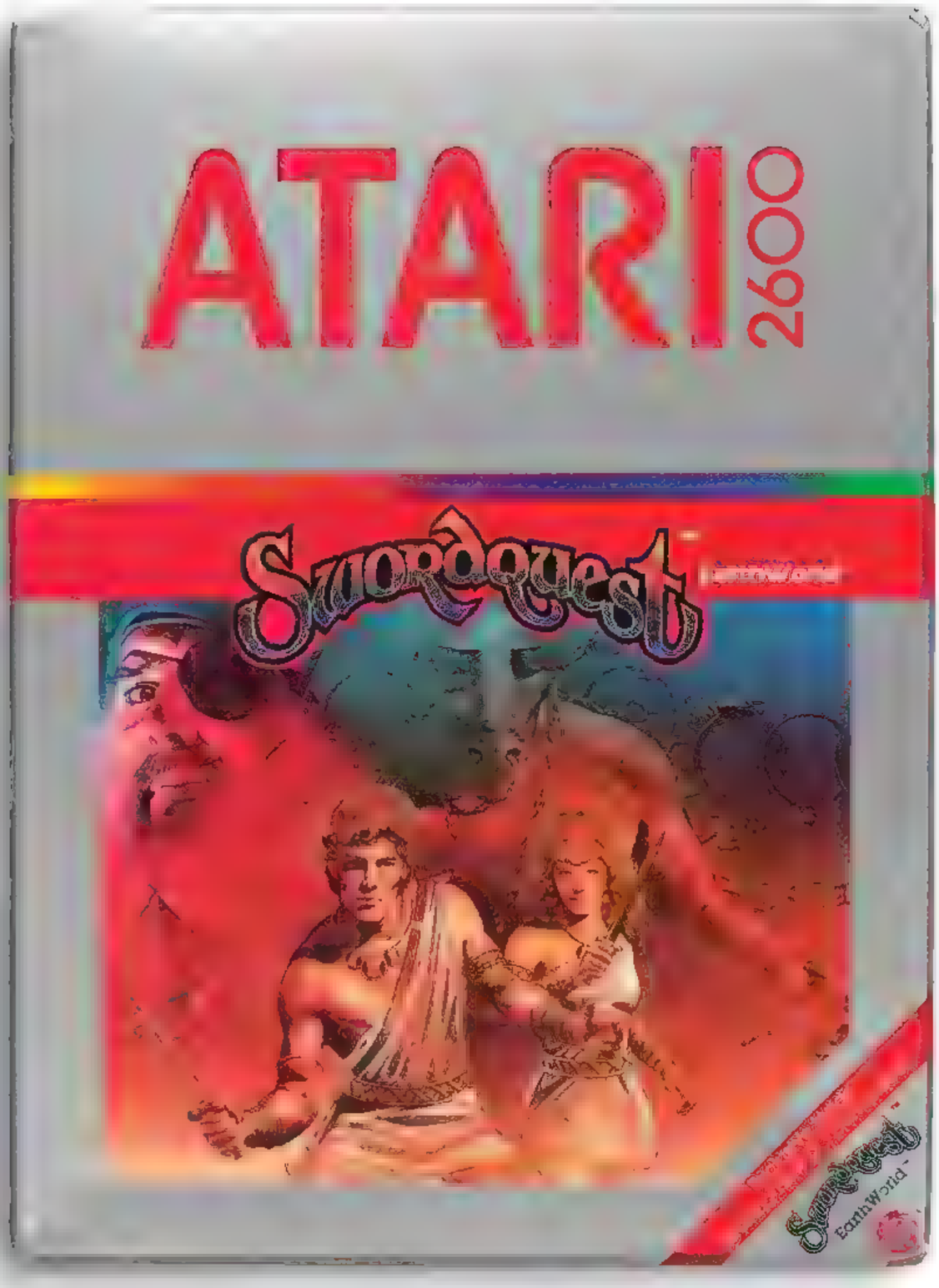

▲ Game packaging design mockup for *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (2600)
Designer: Linda King

▶ Original artwork for the cover of *AtariAge* magazine, promoting the kickoff of the *SwordQuest* competition. The art was created by George Pérez, the artist on best-selling DC Comics titles like *The Teen Titans* and *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. He also penciled each of the *SwordQuest* comic books.
Artist: George Pérez

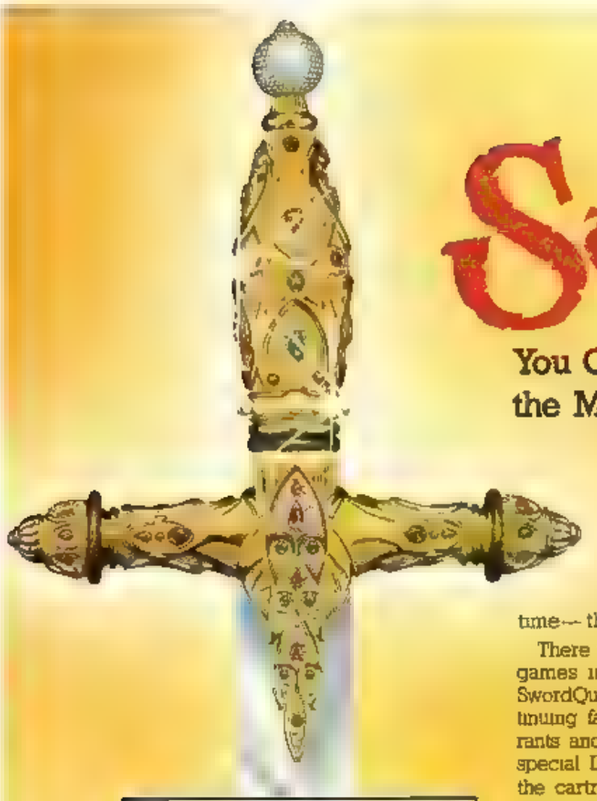


## SWORDQUEST EARTHWORLD

*Earthworld* was the first in a series of innovative adventure games designed be p ayed in conjunction w th a pack in comic book, which contained an original story—and promised a chance to part cipate in a larger, national *SwordQuest* competition. Players would gather cues from the gameplay, which would y eld help in finding hidden words w th n the comic. Those words could be submitted to qualify for an opportunity to play in the nat onal competition, with a fabulous prize at the center of each one—a jewe ed talisman with a sma l sword at its center, valued at $25.000. The winners of each game-or ented competition would then be brought together for a final gameplay round, w th the "Sword of Ultimate Sorcery" as its prize. *Earthworld's* "Ta isman of Penultimate Truth" was eventua ly won by 20 year-old Stephen Bell of Detroit. Intrigu ngly, the concept for *Earthworld* (and the elaborate competition) began life as a proposed sequel to the game *Adventure*




▲ Game packaging for *SwordQuest Earthworld* (2600)
Artist: Warren Chang



# SwordQuest!

## You Can Win Fabulous Prizes by Solving the Mysteries of Four New Cartridges

In October, Atari presents the *EarthWorld* Game Program cartridge, launching the most exciting real-life treasure hunt of our time—the SwordQuest Cycle.

There will be *four* new SwordQuest games in all, each part of the total SwordQuest adventure story. This continuing fantasy tale of treacherous tyrants and daring deeds is told in the special DC comic books packed with the cartridges, and played out in the games themselves.

But the SwordQuest challenge is more than on-screen action—by finding clues hidden in each cartridge and comic book combination, players can win prizes worth thousands of dollars!

The Quest begins with *EarthWorld*, which holds the key to winning a spectacular 18kt solid gold Talisman, studded with twelve diamonds and twelve other precious stones—a prize produced at a cost of $25,000.

THE TALISMAN

THE CROWN

Next comes *FireWorld*, in early 1983. The winner of the *FireWorld* contest walks off with a Chalice, a gorgeous goblet of platinum and gold, glistening with rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and pearls—another $25,000 prize.

Later in 1983 there is *WaterWorld*, with a prize truly fit for a king—a $25,000 golden Crown, encrusted with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, green tourmalines, and aquamarines.

Finally comes *AirWorld*. Uncovering its secrets will win the fourth $25,000 prize for some lucky player—it's a modern-day version of the mythical Philosopher's Stone, encased in an 18kt gold box studded with emeralds, rubies, diamonds, and citrines.

THE CHALICE

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

And when the SwordQuest cycle is complete, it will be time for the fifth and final challenge of SwordQuest—the answer which will earn the grand prize winner an incredible jewel encrusted Sword, with 18kt gold handle and gleaming silver blade, blazing with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires—a $50,000 sword!

What kind of secrets are hidden in the games? No one is saying—but Jewel Savadelis, Atari's Director of Marketing Software, says, "When someone finds the clues, they'll know it!

"All the contest details will be enclosed in the cartridge boxes," she explains, "but I can tell you that we're going to recognize *everyone* who finds at least a single valid clue. Find more, you'll receive a greater level of recognition. But you'll have to find all five valid clues to be eligible to win the major prize for each cartridge—and that fifth valid clue is a *real* challenge!"

▲ ▶ Two-page article from the Sept/Oct 1982 issue of *AtariAge* magazine, promoting the *SwordQuest* competition